BEAUTY TALBOT.

VOL. II.

BEAUTY TALBOT.

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CHAPTER I.

AN INVITATION.

For the miniature household there was still the same tranquil existence. It might have been almost called domestic,—the very essence of domestic. And yet this effect might seem strange, with such mundane elements as a veteran belle, (veteran in the sense of one who has served her ten years), and an Exquisite who has sold out of that regiment prematurely, and thinks he has made a mistake. But there was in the household one binding and purifying element, the watchful, loving daughter,

whose very labour and energy and application that never tired or slept, performed miraculous prodigies, as it always will do. The strange charm of that earnestness and affection, seen to be so utterly unselfish, never failed, or, rather, was increasing in power every day. The fragile soul of Beauty Talbot would have been helpless before even a weaker mind: and he was, in truth, being kept like some of those youths, brought up in fairy valleys, jealously guarded from the knowledge of men and women and the world, an attempt which even in the fairy tales, alas! invariably broke down!

Even had the mind of her father been nourishing any thoughts of enfranchisement, any longing looks backwards towards the fairy gardens he had been taken from, he was soon to see what difficulties

there were in the way of his emancipation. He was kept in by a succession of barriers of soft wood and moss, endless in number, and likely to take up too much time and trouble to break through. Thus the task of education went on; a drive three times a week, and the greater expedition to town from Pengley Station, and the solemn dinner-party at distant gorgeous palaces, whither the whole party set out in grand *tenue*, and returned more or less prostrated—but still having done their duty, as the country expects every man and woman to do. Then there was the working together, and the lighting of the lamp, with the applause for the Beauty's last composition, and the reading out by Livy of novel or poem, the former carefully selected, as illustrating him and his wife. This was in the hands of this

gentle schoolmistress, their daughter. They had their round of duties and little pleasures. She read to them, *him* rather, and amused him, was ever watchful and ready at a moment to dart in to the place when any of his squad of entertainers flagged or dropped down in the ranks. The round of life became as regular as that of an institution. There was the little box of a place and its green garden and flowers, there was the walk after breakfast, and the walk after lunch, there was the village and the town, with the young happy husbands and happy circles, men who ambled round the domestic circus with a contented monotony.

Sometimes she read out even such a work as one of Mr. Froude's romances, and her voice was so steady and musical that she imparted to the rather dry pro-

ceedings of King Harry and Queen Mary, glimpses of interest; though at times the Beauty flagged, and yawned, and wandered to the piano to embody "a thought" by way of relief. He became rather proud of his historical knowledge thus refreshed, and thus administered—he could never have tackled the volumes themselves—and rather bewildered some of his friends whom he favoured with scraps, and made them ask what on earth was Beauty putting such things into his well oiled head for. The effect of all was discipline, and the Beauty felt that in this little house, and in these little tranquil pursuits life would go on always, and he would grow full, and stout, and heavy, and old, while the old charms and attractions were to become smaller and dimmer, and more uninteresting, as their little waggonette

rolled easily down the hill. Livy, the genius of the household, might now halt. Her work was almost done.

The people about Pengley naturally fancied that the news of the death of his son-in-law would take down Mr. Hardman's airs a little. But, in truth, he was not at all displeased "at the turn matters had taken," his own phrase. In the first place, he missed—and woefully missed—the invaluable aid of his daughter, though not for a moment would he acknowledge such a thing, even to himself. In his social advances he found himself of a sudden as powerless as the boy from whom Sir Walter Scott cut off the button. She had taken herself off, as he put it, and had thrown all the duties of the place on his poor back. How could he find time to be going to see ladies? As for her—Mrs.

Hardman—as well might he put one of the sirloins hanging in Stubber's shop in the carriage, and tell it to go paying visits. Selfishly she had taken care of herself, and left him there to manage as he could. The relations, too, of the deceased Colonel had behaved in execrable taste. They had been cold and "stand-off." It had been conveyed to him that they did not approve nor disapprove the connection. This he laid entirely to the account of his daughter, who "had no knowledge of the world," and, at her age, was still as helpless as a child. Indeed, when he came calmly to consider the alliance—the brilliant smoke having cleared away with the petards of the wedding, &c.—he found it was a poor and profitless business enough. "He took nothing by it but expense."

Still, on this sudden demise of his son-

in-law, it was wonderful the large amount of discount that he got out of the transaction. His favourite and often-quoted domestic sank into the second place, beside the "death of my son-in-law," the "great blow we have all sustained," &c. The worst was, the very nature of the distinction cut him off from all public opportunity of celebrating it. He could not dine out, or have people to dine; and yet without these occasions how was he to impress on the public the loss he had sustained? He might pay visits, but that would be scarcely decent; and very few came to visit him. Still he could make his servants exhibit the most poignant and conspicuous grief; and the London tailor fitted Miller, who had driven the Duke, with an inky garment, that seemed to shine and reflect all things with the

glassiness of a deep well, and hung about with festoons and hawsers of sepulchral cordage. But the quiet contempt of the wearer, his sarcastic smile as he appeared in these sables, was a perfect protest, and undid the whole effect.

If Mr. Hardman could have set up a hatchment on the face of his house, he would have done so; but even the undertaker, whom he consulted, said they could scarcely go so far as that. He would not even have objected to the expense and trouble of "bringing the body over," and some faint notion crossed his mind of consulting the late Colonel's noble relations on the matter; but he shrank from the cold snubbing which he had instinct enough to perceive would be in store for him.

Of the "bereaved widow," as he de-

lighted in styling her—"my daughter, Mrs. Labouchere, her husband carried off suddenly—a most unfortunate business, sir,"—he, strange to say, heard little. She barely deigned to communicate her movements to him. She went to a small French port by herself and remained there. Those who saw her privately—and there was no better judge than her maid that had "gone out" and returned with her—bore testimony to her strong grief and desolation after the husband she had lost. With all the hard crystallization that had grown round her heart in that household—the damp, unwholesome, graveyard fungi, which had so unhealthily crept over her soul in defiance of her struggles—she had learned to appreciate the honest, elderly devotion of the man who had chosen her; and his death had been a great shock.

Their past life had been pleasant, though disturbed by a few storms; but it was when he was gone that she discovered that she could, as time went on, have been supremely happy with him, had fate allowed; and this deprivation she somehow associated with those who had thwarted and mortified her. As her liking for him grew and opened, she seemed to hold the idea that something was "between them"—that those who disliked her had inspired him with the idea that she was not his equal in rank and refinement—a something which, if removed, their happiness would have been great. On his death-bed he thanked her in his chivalrous, high-bred way.

"If I had lived, dearest," he said, "I could have shown you what I thought of the great honour you did me; and if

I had been allowed to live, I would have tried to prove it: still you have been the best of wives, and if I had had time I would have understood you better. A good deal," he added, with his soft, good-natured smile, "was done to prevent me from understanding you—indeed, to keep me from you for ever; but, thank God, that did not succeed. I never believed that story, dearest, though ample proof was offered."

"What they said about what took place in Ireland—"

"Not a word of it! not a word! Not if they had sent me a dozen more letters. I tore them up, and never read beyond the line where their calumny began."

"I know that. I believe it. Oh, if we had but time, the best refutation would be my life, and the love it would show

for you. I could tell you her name who wrote these falsehoods to you."

"Ah, women!" he said, smiling; "they catch at all weapons in these cases; and they are not so much to blame. It would be different with them. But you will know this, dearest: they had no effect on me."

"What, not in those first days when you possibly neglected me and looked down on us; and *that woman's* insidious hints and stories never came back to you; that loving a low rich man's daughter? You were too noble, dearest husband, to be conscious of it; but that was working in you—that was her work—and, oh, if I but live, if I but get back to England—"

She spoke so sternly, coldly, and solemnly, that he half raised himself on his elbow to look at her.

"What woman? Who is this?"

She saw the dangerous colour mounting on his cheek, and quietly floated the subject away, as one might a log in the water. Long months after it came drifting up to her as she stood by the strand. She had been expecting it wistfully, anxiously. What had restrained her was the rigorous decencies of widowhood. She must be sorrowful, *secundum artem*, before she could think of other things. That dismal quarantine of mourning must be put in, else she dare not mingle with her kind. Six, seven, eight months went by. *Then* surely she might "divert her thoughts." Then people began to tell her it was "a duty to make an exertion." She had another duty to her father; she would go to him, who was glad now to welcome "an honourable daughter," like

the wicked Sir Giles of the play. She would be a glory and an ornament for his household, like that Order of Merit "the duke's coachman." She was coming at an awkward time, for "he was going to Bindley."

At last; for the first invitation had gone off like the misfire of a pistol. The lord had met with a severe domestic affliction, which obliged him to put off his party. Such a blow had not fallen on the low rich man in his life. It kept him awake for two or three nights—a malady about as unknown to him as tears; it made him fume and rage like a madman. The affliction being now happily softened, the invitation was renewed. The lord had clearly conveyed his wishes,—which Mr. Hardman was not slow to understand—that Mrs. Hardman should not attend the

solemnities, though he had complied with the forms of society by seeming to press her to attend. This she herself understood.

Livy and her mother, floating down the pleasant but humdrum stream of their domestic life, were talking together one morning in that pleasant unanimity which made it almost like the musings of a single mind. There was the one usual subject, the Beauty: "how good he was getting; how happy their life was and would be now! Indeed, there was now the long-promised, long-talked of foreign tour—a charming and happy trio going to see palaces and gardens and delightful towns, dining together at cafés, supping, sitting in the gardens, listening to the music. They might, indeed, now have a holiday, and a handsome sum had been put by for the trip. It was in honour of

Mrs. Talbot's birthday. "Indeed, dear," says Livy, as if to her sister, "indeed, Beauty deserves it. It is wonderful, his self-denial, and goodness, and content with his life here. There is something noble in it, dear, is it not?"

Livy would scarcely have made this statement on affidavit, but she wished to impress her mother, who smiled.

"Yes, dear; but it has cost us a deal of pains. However, we have got our pretty yacht in to port, dear, and may now enjoy ourselves on shore."

At that moment the yacht itself sailed in, the Beauty holding an open letter in his hand.

"Very nice, indeed, and very kind of them. A letter from the Bindleys. They have not forgotten me, you see."

"What, Lord Bindley, Beauty dear? An invitation?"

"Yes. Many and many were the delightful weeks I spent there! Some of the happiest days, and, by Jove! they made so much of me;" and he kept looking wistfully at the letter. "But that's all over now!"

"All over now? No, dear Beauty; why should you think that?"

"Oh, there's such a fuss and pother made, as if a man couldn't put a few things into a portmanteau, and go and shoot a few birds at a friend's house. They all do it. There's Magnay, with his six children, he's away half the year. There's Thomas, and a heap more. But *I* can't go without a fuss being made. It's very unfair."

He went out, and it was assumed that his last statement was quite correct; *i.e.*

that he could not go without a fuss being made—in fact, could not go at all. But the gentle Livy, with brightening eyes, looked up at her mother.

"Poor Beauty! he deserves a holiday; he's been *so* good, and he seems to have set his heart on this. He used to like shooting so."

"Go without *me*, dear—without his wife or daughter? It is quite unusual."

"Only for a few days," pleaded his daughter. "*Think*, dear; it is pushing it too far. After all, as he says, other gentlemen do it, even the one with six children."

"You don't know him, dear; you can't know what men are."

"And after all, it is only three or four hours from here, so we can have him back at once, if you want him. He need only

stay three or four days. Oh, let him go, do; and we shall have him back in time for your birthday."

The mother smiled. The Beauty, who had indeed given up his scheme as hopeless, was agreeably surprised to be told that he was given furlough. Not that he admitted that any one had power to prevent him; but he knew that so many difficulties would be thrown in his way as to make the expedition impossible. He could hardly believe his ears. More wonderful still, he was to go alone. Not that he allowed to himself for a moment that any one in that house had power to restrain his movements; but he had fallen so insensibly under the inflexible rules of the house——

That day, then, to his amazement, he found that no objection was made to the little scheme; on the contrary, there was

a universal enjoyment and delight through the house, as though a legacy had been left, or Papa or Tom was coming home. For with unselfish mothers, faithful worshippers of their lordly king of brutes—oftener the brute himself—this cheap pleasure comes the most welcome. He was delighted—was like a boy sent home for a few days. He was the whole morning over his gun. It would be dull enough but for that pastime—"Only a lot of men herded together." "Never mind," said the two ladies; "dear Beauty must try to enjoy himself." There was then Mrs. Talbot's birthday drawing on; he was to be home for that. And within a couple of days he had gone away triumphant and happy, leaving them complacently happy also. And he was to be back, positively, in three days—by Saturday.

CHAPTER II.

FESTIVITIES AT BINDLEY.

At Bindley, Lord and Lady Bindley were entertaining a distinguished circle of guests; though there was not at any period of the visit a circle; for the house was vast and rambling, and the guests were nearly always scattered. Neither were these latter "distinguished;" for they included a great many of those curiously obscure persons and people who are somehow necessary to the great and noble. "Hangers-on" would be too familiar a term; jackals would be offensive; and yet some such office they do

fill. They are generally people of slender means, possibly of obscure birth, though that is not inquired into; but they are infinitely useful, work hard, and when not on the ground, which happens once or twice, make their absence felt.

Thus at Bindley there filled these offices "the Woods," wife and husband; she a bustling lady's-maid sort of woman, with a sharp manner; he a bushy yellow-whiskered man, who had got to know every one, who arranged everything at Bindley. Again, there were two Malcolm girls, who were fetched from some distance, and came with their aunt, and were believed to be a half-pay officer's daughters; and there was Mr. Bolton, who came from some strange garret about St. James's, but who pastured and browsed all the year round on the rich

commons and lawns of "noblemen and gentlemen." No one asked who *he* was. He had a grave and quiet sufficiency which carried him through, an assertion that seemed to repel inquiry, an air and carriage that is worth hundred pound notes. Cork-like, this gentleman always floated up to the surface among the best. How he lived no one knew, but he was always at the best houses. When Bindley, therefore, and other places, opened their gates for a fortnight's official visiting, all these useful supernumeraries received notice, much as a stage-manager would send round to his subjects. Indeed it was more like some of those amateur orchestral societies where, though amateurs constitute the body, a sprinkling of professionals is necessary to make "the thing go." These were the professionals who came

to "dear Lord Bindley's" regularly; but besides these there came the regular guests, who arrived with all honours, and whom the others contributed to entertain.

Such were the colourless (morally speaking) ladies of true breeding and refinement, the Countess Seaman, and her two daughters, the Ladies Mary and Alice Mariner—elegant, tranquil, and trained; Mr. Bulfin, the Member; the Lord Robert we met before, who turned up later, and all but invited himself, but they were delighted to have him; Mr. Talbot, and Mr. Hardman.

Bindley was a stone fortress-like building, rising bluntly in a fine park. There were noble trees, ponds, and a few deer seen skipping away coquettishly as the frequent carriage came rolling up the

avenue, smooth as a skater, on the outside. There was a "grand hall," "restored" cleverly—*i.e.*, rebuilt—by Inigo Robinson, the well-known fashionable architect—a "gentleman," be it understood, and not a professional man; and the house was "mounted" in the best taste, as indeed it might be said, without intention of jest, the guests were. The stables were a show in themselves; and grim visitors, intending to be sarcastic, used to wish they were horses. Everybody was brought "to see the stables," even unequine visitors; and there is nothing to the untechnical eye less likely to impress. In the house was the usual staff, high-sounding names,—groom of the chambers, and the like.

This was the first night of the festival, and though nearly the whole company

had then arrived, it was like the first day's voyage out on board a steamer; no one had settled or shaken down into their places, and all were looking at each other askance.

The inauguration dinner was over. Lord Bindley had sat on his throne, with Louisa Mary, Countess Seaman, at his side,—a tall and vast lady, with an impassive and monumental face, trained to show neither joy nor sorrow, and yet by some arrangement of her hair suggesting the crest of a cockatoo. Her daughters had camped lower down. The supernumeraries had arrived early, had got out their properties and dresses, and were working hard already. They had all come up, or rather come in, to the "noble" drawing-room at Bindley, which, as picnic parties know, is on the ground

floor, and with its eight great windows gives upon the lawn. The lamps are lit, balls of powder are bent over tea-cups, the new orange liveries are on, and Wood and wife are spurring about like mounted orderlies. Every instant they are beside the noble host and hostess making a suggestion :

"I think, my lord, if Miss Georgina Malcolm were to sing now." "Ah, very good idea, Wood. My lady will go and ask her." Or Mrs. Wood draws rein beside the hostess. She thinks "If they got the two old gentlemen down to whist, Mrs. Toft and Miss Toft would make up the party." Lady Bindley smiles approbation ; a very good idea. "Don't know what they should do without the Woods?" They have no ideas their own property, and think this

rather cheap faculty of "hitting on ideas" perfectly wonderful.

Mr. Bolton was present, browsing quietly off Mr. Bulfin, the Member, and the Lord Robert. Bolton knew nothing of the topics kindred to these gentlemen, yet with that valuable, weighty manner of his, contrived that both should be listening to him with a deference and a delusion that they were receiving real information from a man well up in the subjects. Yet on analysis his information resolved itself into the quotation of aristocratic authority. "When I was at Plympton last year the French minister was there, and he said," &c.; or, with grave correction across the table, "I think you are misinformed. Clumper himself told me the whole story, and complained bitterly of the man;" "Clumper" being

the Viscount with that title. Yet he had an admirable gift, for these noble names were introduced, not with constraint and even tremor, but with a calm steadiness that was admirable.

The Malcolm girls were not "put on," but were wisely kept in hand, so as not to exhaust all the attraction. They were in reserve, as it were. By and by all would see.

A delightful night for the Beauty. It seemed like a dream, or rather as if he was awake again, and all between had been a dream. The dressing-table upstairs was covered with the silver-backed brushes, now again on their travels, with the essences, silver boxes, and general display of Truefittism. *That* was like the old days. Here he was himself, beautiful to look at. Such linen, such

hair, such rings. He was like the morning star, and he was so happy. The old little utterances came back uninvited; congealed, as it were, like the Munchausen words,—even the old lisp. And now Wood's wife, putting spurs to her steed, is beside my lord whispering, and nodding in the direction of the Beauty. And my lord says, "Ah, to be sure. A capital idea!" And away the aide-de-camp canters, and is beside the Beauty in a second. "Oh, you must. His lordship makes it a point." There is a joke among the men about the Beauty's singing, and great fun is looked for from the sentimental chanting of the Beauty. "Oh, I say, you must now. You shan't get off. Sit down, Talbot, and give us that little thing of your own."

Reluctantly he agrees, but he is so

happy he would do anything. Yes, he would give them a short thing he composed—a mere trifle—"One last and lingering smile." He had not his faithful accompanyist with him; but he had brought the music—by a sort of accident he seemed to convey—and a young lady was on the spot put to the duty. Then he began plaintively and sweetly:—

"He stood beside me at the door," *κ. τ. λ.*

The "men" nudged each other at his sweetest passages. They were intensely amused, and chuckled at the Beauty's pathos. As he rose, a hearty man said,—

"Of course that was yourself, eh? Drawn from life, eh?"

"How?"

"Oh, the lingering smile, of course; and an uncommon lingering one it was,

I'm sure. They couldn't get rid of it."

The Beauty was coldly repelling this familiarity, when a soft but firm voice tingled in his ear,—

"Whether founded on fact or no, it is a good song, Mr. Talbot. Not forgotten me, I hope?"

Who was this?

At the other end of the room there was a commotion. A tall, pink-faced, wiry man was pompously offering greetings and excuses mixed with many a "my lord, my lord."

The Beauty started when he saw the face from which the voice had issued. It was Mrs. Labouchere, dressed in velvet and jewels; from a girl become a matron, with a tone of majesty and stateliness, her features firm, grown more hardened and classical, and with an interest of grief in

her face. The fire in her eyes had intensified. She was surprisingly handsome, assured, and *dangerous*.

She had found the seaport unendurable; and, moreover, she wanted some *action*, some doing, to take her thoughts off. A son of this Lord Bindley had been in Colonel Labouchere's corps—Harry Bindley—and admired her cleverness, her "talk," her wit; in short, it would seem, everything but *herself*, which he could not admit. After his glowing description, she was included in Mr. Hardman's invitations. That gentleman had been particularly confounded and put out by it.

"I am sorry, Rosa," he said apologising solemnly, when she met him in London, "that I shall have to leave you here; I have been asked to Bindley, to Lord Bindley's, a friend of mine. You

know this place, and are welcome to entertain yourself here. I have told my coachman he is to hold himself at your service; my carriage and horses you can use."

"Dear father," she said, calmly, "they have asked me also; and you will think it strange, but I must go."

Mr. Hardman grew red and hot. His weak soul looked to the monopoly of the invitation—to his royalty, as it were, in the favour of the lord.

"Going to Bindley! O, folly! What would *you* do there?"

"I have led such a life ever since—chafing, and fretting, and mourning—with the iron entering into my very heart. I want to fly from myself—for a time."

"Iron nonsense! You are left pretty well off. But I really can't have you

there. I have reasons of my own; and, to tell you the truth, I don't think my Lord Bindley would be anxious to have you. In your present spirits, you would not be an addition to the company."

"Father, pray don't weary me further by discussion; but I *must* go there. I have told you the reason."

"Ah, I know," sneered the man of business; "to look about and pick up a husband. Very soon though; ain't it?"

She gave him a look of warning—a wicked one; yet he felt there was as much contempt as danger in it. He stalked away, and she could allow him the indemnity of grumbling and stamping.

Remarkable looking as she was before she married Colonel Labouchere, she was now greatly changed. Whether from his training, or the odd, adventurous, social

life out in Gibraltar, she had acquired a style and character of manner, which she wanted; something akin to the change which turns the country lad into the smart soldier. Besides, grief and some other trials had given a firmness to her face; and from the time, on her entering the room, her ear caught the plaintive sound of the Beauty's notes, a sparkle came into her eyes, as though the fires of the brain and soul within had been stirred into a crackling blaze. Powerful eyes they seemed; and perhaps it occurred to her as a strange omen, received with exultation, that she should have entered exactly as the Beauty was commencing his simple lay.

The appearance of this stately woman caused a sensation. Mr. Bolton, busy in corners, telling, softly, anecdotes which

might have been commentated on by references to particular pages of the Peerage (as thus—"see 'Combermere,' p. 50; see 'Duke of Manchester,' p. 100, &c.), raised his head slowly. Of course he knew all about her;" at least she was like "Lady Jane Minton."

The Woods, spurring over the plain, drew the reins of their respective chargers, to reflect in what way she could be turned to account for the sports and pastimes of Bindley. The Malcolm girls looked at her from afar distrustfully; while the host, a well-known connoisseur of that article of *virtù* known as "a fine woman," was greatly pleased with the sensation produced by his new guest, and for the first time spoke warmly to Mr. Hardman.

"I am so glad you brought Mrs. Labou-

chere; we are greatly indebted to you, indeed."

His lordship was presently improving his acquaintance.

"Hope you are not tired with your journey, Mrs. Labouchere. So kind of you to come to us in this way; and I assure you we shall be as quiet as possible. This is just one of our little yearly domestic gatherings. No fuss or publicity; only a little enjoyment among ourselves."

But the eyes into which he looked were travelling away over to the Beauty, who, unaccustomed to such generous compliments outside his own family, was rather wistfully looking towards the new figure, who had shown such an unexpected enthusiasm. In a few moments she was beside him.

"You have not forgotten an old friend, I see," she said, in a low voice; "and one who wants friends sadly *now*. When I was near the door, as I came up-stairs, and heard your voice, and that song, it so touched me—it went home to me here."

"O you remember my little song!" he said, pleased. "I know I only sang it for you once."

"It is really strange," she said, reflectively; "I heard it just as I left, as I was going away to happiness; and now, as I enter, I hear it again."

"Well, we may hope you are coming back to happiness."

"Not if some people can help it," she said—not to him. "There are those here who do not like me, who would humiliate and undermine me, if they could. They would not care how I suffered."

The Beauty did not take a deep or tragic view of things.

"O, I know," he said, carelessly. "You and Mrs. Talbot did not hit it off very well; but there was nothing in it really. That I am positive of."

She looked at him with a sort of curiosity, but more with contempt.

"Ah! of course. I suppose I magnify things. And how are they? That gentle girl, too?"

The Beauty never liked people to say "your daughter." That gentle girl was a much more suitable phrase, and he was grateful for it.

"O they are famous," he said. "They are both at home. I have promised to be back there on Saturday, to keep her birthday."

"Her!—whose?"

"Mrs. Talbot's. Livy always likes to make a sort of festival of the business. Last year I composed a song specially. A very pretty girl, a neighbour of ours, wrote the words for me. Cramer published it. It was called 'Her Natal Day;' and "the Band" said it was flowing and melodious."

"If it be flowing and melodious, I should give the world to hear it."

"O dear, I'd sing it for you with pleasure; they'll be asking me again presently. And you really like my songs? They are not ambitious, you know; and I don't pretend to be a regular master, and all that; but they are fairly good, you know, in their way; and Challope, a man that sings in the royal choir, told me he had seen things of the regular fellows far worse."

"Ah, that was praise indeed. But you leave here to be home on Saturday?"

"O yes; I have promised solemnly. I suppose the best part of the affair here will be over by then?"

"No; beginning, they told me. And your ——that amiable girl is anxious for this——"

"O, I suppose so," he said, impatiently. "Both of 'em have settled it. You know they look on it as something sacred, and all that. We've never missed it once."

"Oh, I am sorry; the real amusement will begin here by then. The best people will be dropping in by that time; but—Master Talbot must go home to school."

He looked "put out" at this speech.

"School! I hope have done with all that."

Mrs. Wood here caracoled up, as

it were throwing her horse upon his haunches.

"Another song, Mr Talbot; his lordship is most anxious. Any little thing you may have off by heart."

"O," said Mrs. Labouchere, "you will, I know. That thing you told me of—'The Natal Day.'"

The Beauty got through his little melody, the marked attention and interest of the newly arrived securing him the best audience he had had as yet. She explained to his lordship that she felt Mr. Talbot was quite an old friend, or rather, he was associated with some very happy days. People, at the end, cried, so influenced is the herd, "Well done, Talbot, you gave that out well." The Woods, feeling how matters were going, were spurring wildly about the field, and casting about

for a new venture. The Beauty took all this as so much homage to himself; already he felt the bands of the late bondage slipping slowly down to his feet. His voice rose into a louder key, "O, I have written a quantity of things. I have volumes by me. I have always something on the stocks, just to take up when I have a moment. That thing I sang first, 'One last and lingering smile' has always been a hit."

Mr. Bolton, selfish in his generation, had hitherto rather "pooh-poohed" the Beauty; but had tact enough to see that his glass was rising, and would rise faster under patronage. He now struck in.

"I saw a copy of that song on the pianoforte at Mantower when I was staying there."

"O yes, Lady Jane sings it," (She

ought to have paid it that courtesy, as the Beauty had sent it to her.)

"And how the deuce do you do it, Talbot?" another asked. "Now how does the idea strike you first?"

The Beauty smiled with compassion. "These things a man can't teach. It comes by nature. Now that 'Lingering smile' I could no more tell how, or when, it came into my head, than I could that—that candlestick," added the Beauty getting rather confused in his illustration. "It comes to you, and there it is."

"And you catch him and keep him."

"You must explain all this to me, Mr. Talbot," said Mrs. Labouchere, who had come up and listened. "It is very interesting; other composers will not condescend to let us know how they work. They think they are betraying secrets."

Other composers! Her tone was so firm and bold and genuine, that this compliment produced no smile; the public standing round and confirming it. That night went on very pleasantly. The Beauty went to his room with a feeling that he had taken one huge stride backwards some ten or fifteen years, and was enjoying his old life once more

The breakfast table at Bindley was an enlivening scene, a pleasant and gay expectation of an enjoyable day, shooting, driving, what not, eddying down the table. The Beauty came in late, an Adonis of the morning, in the old mauve stockings,—sweet-scented and curled. He had on a sort of velvet jacket, which made the effect rich and "Titianesque." His irreverent friends nudged each other, and complimented him ironically; but there

was a quiet self-sufficieney about the Beauty which was nearly as defensive as real dignity. Mrs. Labouchere heard these remarks;

"Hallo, Talbot, what time is the flower show? When does the ball begin?" and goodnaturedly, as it seemed to the host, sheltered him.

"Mr. Talbot has an artist's eye for colour." She was now quite at home, the centre of a sort of curiosity and attraction; and the Woods, like managers, congratulated themselves on having engaged "such a star."

"I'll tell you what we have been planning,"—said his lordship, "and Wood here says he will arrange it all without any trouble—give a little concert and reception on Saturday night in the new hall. We are so strong in musical talent, that

really it would be a shame not to avail ourselves of the opportunity. What do you think, Mrs. Labouchere?"

She had come down cold and abstracted once more. The chatter of voices about her seemed to annoy her. "I suppose so," she said abstractedly, "one must amuse the herd."

"Yes, so we must. You hear, Talbot, Wood will be offering you an engagement, and you must sing that song of yours—this, 'Give us another smile.'"

"'The last and lingering smile' is the proper name, I think," said Mrs. Labouchere, smiling. "Mr. Talbot will set me right."

"The eminent tenor, Mr Talbot. For one night only! Great attraction!" said one of the clowns of that social circus; and did produce a laugh.

Mr. Talbot here—Talbot there! It was wonderful. His song, his voice, to make such an effect! His cheek literally glowed as the lady recalled the correct name of his song. Surely, this was a change. The glow of old times came back into his cheeks.

"I should be delighted," he said, "to do what I could. It is an excellent idea—a regular concert. O, but unfortunately——"

He stopped; he recalled the festival at home, to which he was bound to present himself.

This roused Mrs. Labouchere.

"What is unfortunate?"

"O, I have to be back—an engagement."

"O nonsense," said Lord Bindley; "we are not to lose our tenor. You must

write and tell them that I and Mrs. Labouchere, and the company here, cannot spare you. We want to bring down the house with your 'lingering smile.' Ha! ha!"

Wonderful again! A delicious feeling at his heart—one unknown to him for years, during this state of cipherhood.

Mrs. Labouchere was now alive—all eager.

"Mr. Talbot must tell us of this prior claim. Is it another country house?"

"Well—no," he said, confusedly.

"What, a home one! O, I see; we must respect that—a promise to Mrs. Talbot!"

"Why, yes; exactly," the Beauty said, hardly knowing what he was saying. "Her birthday is on Saturday, you know."

His eye appealed to Mrs. Labouchere, for he was a little confused—unaccustomed to this publicity.

"*I* know!" said that lady, in her hard manner. "I! Not at all, I assure you. What *could* I know about Mrs. Talbot? I only met her once or twice."

Every one looked at her: there was something so hard and pointed in the way she spoke these words. Her face seemed to change as they looked.

(After breakfast, several, talking together, agreed there was "something odd about that woman.")

Mr. Hardman, up to this quite overlooked and smothered by his neighbours, conceived that his daughter was adding to his unpopularity.

"*I* have had the pleasure of meeting Mrs. Talbot, my lord. She has been at

our house; a most charming person to meet; of the—er—highest—er fashion—and connection."

"O, indeed!" said the host, with a polite stare.

Mr. Hardman felt that, with the best intentions, he had said too much. His daughter came to the rescue.

"And it is the more generous in my father to praise this lady so handsomely, as we did not get on so well, you will recollect, Mr. Talbot. Our families did not exactly coalesce."

"O, nonsense," said her father, colouring. "Really this is absurd!"

"No," she said, firmly, and at the same time smiling; "she did not like *us*. She looked down on us—a foolish thing now-a-days. On that account she and I

are sworn foes. You will forgive me, Mr. Talbot?"

Every one again said, after breakfast, that there was something "curious about that Mrs Labouchere."

"You must talk to our friend Talbot, Mrs. Labouchere," the host said. "We can't have our concert all spoiled by the absence of the tenor. You will find him an excuse. If it is properly put before the lady, it will be all right. O, you must stay, Talbot."

The Beauty thought of the solemn obligations—the sweet face of Livy—the expectant women. He felt it was impossible—about as impossible as that the sun should not rise.

"O, they expect me," he said. "I'm so sorry. And"—he added, wistfully—"I should like it so. You see, it's her

birthday; and I'm to give her presents, and she's to have one for me; and it's never been omitted since we were married. O," added the Beauty, with a wistful air of doubt, that was almost comic, "I *know* it would be quite out of the question."

The men looked one to the other.

"Not an hour's grace?" said one. "Must go back to the minute? Come, don't be selfish, Talbot. Think of *us!*"

"We must not make a rebel of him," said Mrs. Labouchere, excitedly. "No, Mr. Talbot; you shall go back to your school, and be a good boy."

The Beauty had an instinct that the company was laughing at him, but was not quite sure.

The breakfast party then broke up.

Mr. Hardman was not reaping all the glory and distinction he had counted on.

His lordship was by no means as attentive as he had expected. He had counted on a certain homage to his "long-headedness" —not intimacy, which might come later. But he would have liked consultation—*e.g.*, "Here is Mr. Hardman, who knows more than any of us; Mr. Bolton here was asking about the gold question, Mr. Hardman; just give me your opinion on this point. We are putting out some moneys at interest."—This he would have liked, though it rather pointed at "the shop." But Lord Bindley seemed to pass him by, and "not to have time" to consult him. He was, indeed, utterly out of place in the great house, among the great people, and roamed about shy, and purposeless. Ladies in the little scattered morning rooms, as he prowled in and faded out, said,—"Here's this dreadful manufactur-

ing man again!" However, he had one satisfaction, a long morning in the library, where he wrote many letters to people to whom he would not otherwise have written, all for the sake of the glorified heading, "*Bindley, near Chester,*" and also for the postscript—"Be good enough to direct to me here, where I shall be for a few days—*under cover to Lord Bindley.*" Most pleasant of all was it to write in this strain to some of his business friends; after which, as he could not shoot, nor walk far, and as his host did not think fit to devote himself to showing the grounds, gardens, &c., he became a sort of wanderer, finally establishing himself, in his gold glasses, in the library, over a great and statesmanlike work. Somehow it did not seem that his approach to the ministerial character was at all hastening on.

The Beauty, in a sort of dream, had wandered into the drawing-room, bringing with him all the savours of Araby. It was a pleasure to the eye to see this dainty man, or rather half man, among the gilded appointments and bright stuffs of that room. The ladies tolerated him, and even the stately Louisa Mary, Countess of Seaman approved and pronounced him "an elegant creature." The Ladies Mariner quite snubbed him, and literally did not waste more than a couple of "no's" and "yes's" on him, during their whole stay.

A married man, forsooth! One other reason for the Countess's approbation might have been her sudden dislike to that widow who had come among them, and before whom she would almost have paid money to have a red danger

signal carried, to warn off the men, or have employed a spare daughter to "nurse her," as rival omnibus companies do. She had called him to her side, and was pleasantly chatting with him over some "dear Lady Minton," when Mrs. Labouchere appeared at the door in all the coquetry of widowhood, and standing there said, calmly,—

"Oh, Mr. Talbot, about your song. Will you come to the music-room?"

By that desertion, the Beauty lost for ever the patronage of the Countess.

Mrs. Labouchere, without waiting for his decision, had walked on down the corridor, her face looking on the ground, her hands joined behind. As she turned the angle, she said, aloud and quite careless who heard her,—

"Yes, that is my mission. It is too

tempting, and she herself has put him into my hands."

There was no one in the music-room.

"Would you redeem your promise," she said, "and sing me your song, calmly and without the fuss of people listening and talking?"

The Beauty, enchanted, sat down and sang, a little nervously, his favourite, "He gave one last and lingering smile." She was not rapturous in praise, but judicious.

"It is good music, and I like it better each time. Just one more, Mr. Talbot."

He gratified her with the one "now on the stocks."

"This," he said, "I am now composing. It is in rather a raw state; but I assure you no one else has heard it."

He also gave her "ideas" of others,

and, in short, spent a most delightful half-hour. Suddenly she said,—

"What a pity! It is like a fatality, and so hard on that good-natured Lord Bindley. It is most unfortunate!"

"What, about the concert? O, yes, so provoking! But you know I couldn't well——O, they'd never forgive it,—she and Livy. O, out of the question!"

"How would any one think of asking you? Alas! I once could put myself in their place; now I cannot. But we owe something to Lord Bindley. Could you not write to them? Birthdays are often postponed—kept on the day following; and if you said you'd be at home by the first train on Sunday morning, no reasonable people——"

"Oh, I declare, yes!" cried the Beauty,

in delight, on whom the dreadful sacrifice had been weighing.

"You must think it over," she said, coldly; "and find some way of managing it. In a house like this we are all bound to make a few sacrifices, and at least, an exertion. Would you mind singing another song? I have not heard a note of music for months." So the Beauty sang again. Such a happy morning it proved for him.

CHAPTER III.

A DOUBT.

WHILE the Beauty sings, we look across the country to his pleasant home, through the glasses of that little cabinet, where are enshrined the two gentle female hearts. Their eyes would pierce, if they could, all the plantations, the hills, and mountains, and towns that lay between them and their darling. As it was, they filled up many an hour, speculating as to what the Beauty was busy with, how he was amusing himself. They had a full and accurate list of the company, as they thought, and they knew there could be no danger. He

was sure to be good friends with that old Lady Seaman. The Woods were fussy, but safe people. The Mariner girls "would not look at him." They were very happy together, and could enjoy themselves, for, to say the truth, the Beauty was rather a heavy strain and responsibility. They were not alone, for that good fellow, young Hardman, was over with them morning, noon, and night. He, too, had a great deal off his mind; for he had got leave from his colonel, and had returned as soon as the Towers was free. His honest good will, his open devotion to Livy, increasing every hour, made him a welcome visitor, and before long, Mrs. Talbot saw what was coming, just as the careless lounger, standing by the water's edge, sees two blocks of wood slowly, but surely, drifting together. Livy was human, was a girl—

a tender, impulsive girl—though there seemed to be an impression that she was bound by a vow of almost conventual celibacy.

Mrs. Talbot soon saw with a sigh that her inclination to the young man could not now be checked without much suffering and misery to both. There was also her own enmity to *that* house; but that had gone into the past. The woman had been routed. She was, besides, a widow, and had bitterly atoned for any offences in that way. So she could justly tolerate, if not afford to look back with pity and contempt. Livy herself, knowing towards what a forbidden country she was straying, yet to her so delightful and attractive, kept her eyes turned away as she walked on. It was so new and pleasant, if she but dared. But her vocation seemed to

lead her in another direction. How noble, how generous, how "off-hand" and manly he was, so tender and delicate, and yet so bold and generous. He had that natural simplicity, so charming in a man, which to some has the air of egotism, from telling personal experiences; but which, indeed, only arises from a wish to please. Now that he was relieved from the Upas tree at home, that dreadful tree whose branches were of "Brummagem" metal, and kept the bright sunlight from falling, he seemed as happy as a child.

He was full of plans for their entertainment, and it was he who suggested that special journey to London, when all the shops of the Mechi exploitation were to be ransacked to choose a dressing-case for the Beauty—a surprise for him on his return. There were to be new ivory

brushes; the others had, indeed, served their full time, veterans that might go into hospital. It was properly Mrs. Talbot's office to receive such an offering; but transactions with the Beauty of this description generally took the shape of some trifle to her, to be compensated for by something of ten times its worth to him. The giving a present to her amounted, in fact, to the giving one to him.

They had some delightful days in London, engaged in these exploring parties, and at last a small "chest" was selected, stored with costly vessels for holding all sorts of scented and greasy things, with the Beauty's crest and monogram peering out of an ambuscade at every corner. The cost of this sumptuous present was defrayed out of

certain little savings put by for many years, but which were not half so valuable as the anticipated delight and surprise of their Beauty.

During these days the young man has been growing more and more sensible of the sweet nature of Livy—more drawn to her every hour. Mrs. Talbot had seen, and seen again, and one night, when the Beauty had been gone but three or four days—her old fashionable heart seemed to soften—the memory of the dear child's devotion and unwearied labours in her cause came back on her, and it seemed to her it might now be time for all this to end; so when she had sent Livy away on some pretence she led the young man on to speak of his attachment, which he did with a delighted openness, enlarging on his prospects and difficulties.

"My father will, of course, never agree to it; he wishes me to *buy*—that is his own word—some young girl who belongs to some noble family. But I *could* not do it, even if I had never seen your daughter. It seems to me so mean, so base—this trafficking in love and riches and titles."

A faint tint came into her face; for this had been *her* old "trade." He did not see it, and went on—

"Not that my father is to blame, as that is the fashion after which he has lived, and in which he was born. But I have great friends who will push me on. I know, too, that my sister was foolish enough to offend you, but a heavy chastisement has overtaken her, and she has trials enough to punish her. You are too generous to think any more of *that*."

Mrs. Talbot was pleased. She liked this boy; she would not be sorry to snatch him from among that corrupt set. She spoke her mind frankly.

"Our ideas change so strangely, I cannot account for it. But still it will be for the best, though I thought we never could bring ourselves to part with her. But still she has done so much for us—she has been a joy in the house—that I must not be too selfish, but must at last think of her."

"O, how good and kind of you," the young man cried in a rapture. "But you shall not lose her. We shall always be with, or near, you. I shall get some place close by, and we shall be so happy."

The colour came into our Livy's face when she was told of this proposal.

She could hardly believe her senses. It seemed to her so natural that the old arrangement—the old "watch-dog" arrangement—should go on until she became old or died. Such a sacrifice seemed to her but the natural order. Within that same order it seemed unaccountable that her dream of such things should be accepted.

This news was to be a surprise for the Beauty when he returned. Of course his consent would have to be asked in a formal way—a courtesy that was due; but his "ways" were so well known by this time that, as conjurors can extract any wine named from the wonderful bottle, so could they extract any answer they pleased from their Beauty. He would, indeed, find an *inconvenience* in the loss of that indefatigably affectionate girl.

They had now all but planned the wedding; for a kind of soft anticipation, and even romance, seemed to fill Mrs. Talbot. She spoke a great deal of being "unselfish;" and, indeed, it seemed to have flashed on her suddenly that, after all, it was only fitting that her daughter should enter on the same course as she herself had done. As for Livy, this gracious enfranchisement was something too charming. She would otherwise have never let either thought enter her gentle brains. It was as though she was a child enlarged into a garden, among the flowers. It was so with her young lover, though he trembled as he thought of his rough and rude father. Indeed, if a strict analysis had been made of Mrs. Talbot's motives, some such earthy sediment as this — a satisfaction in frustrating his

schemes—would have been found precipitated at the bottom.

One evening Dick had dined with them, as usual, when the carrier arrived with a small chest. This was the Mechian present, sent down from London, all furnished and glorious. There was great delight in opening and laying out these noble trophies—brushes, pots, &c.—each of which was splendid with a most complicated monogram.

There were actual cries of joy; but louder than the cries were the anticipations —how delighted the Beauty would be! how enchanted! for he had not the remotest conception that so costly a present was in store for him. Usually it took the shape of a little two-guinea jewel case for his studs, rings, &c.; now that of studs and rings themselves; but this was some-

thing gigantic—as the resources of the two women were somewhat strained—and was in the nature of a premium for a good boy, which Mr. Talbot had exhibited himself to be for so many years.

Just as the treasure had been put by, and the raptures were over, the postman's ring was heard; and Livy, starting up, as was her custom, flew to take in the letter. She came back holding it up in triumph. It was from the Beauty—his first letter.

"And to me, mamma; and *such* a long one."

"To *you?*" repeated the mother. "How very strange!"

The daughter's pleasure made it seem only delightful to her. It was opened, and found to be amazingly long for the Beauty. It ran:—

"DEAREST LIVY,

"I got your letter, and was glad to hear that you and mamma are so well. We are all very pleasant in this house, which is full of people, and very nice people too. They are all so civil to me, asking me to sing; and Lord Bindley has got quite fond of "The Last and Lingering Smile," and asks for it every night. They are delighted, too, with my new song, and want me to publish it at once; so I think I shall, as soon as I can get a moment of time to put it in shape. There is to be a grand event upon Saturday next—a great concert, given to the people round. Over one hundred and fifty invited. Only think! I have had *deputations* coming to me to ask me to be the *leading tenor*, and Lord Bindley is quite serious about it, and will be out

with us for ever. He says I will *spoil* his concert, and he will have to give it up. I really hardly know what to do, there is such pressure brought to bear on one. They think it so childish and unmeaning, as it would only make the difference of a day; and they say I could get the first train next morning, and be with you early. Of course I told them I was pledged to you, that I had never missed it once, and could not do it for anything. So I told them; but they say that all the great people—the queen, &c.—change about their birthdays, according to convenience —that is, the keeping of them. Of course I shall go to you, as I *said* so; but I am in a most disagreeable fix, as Lord Bindley thinks it 'unmeaning' and 'ungracious.' So a lady here said it had quite *that* air. Of course it was not her view; but she

said people would *say* that. However, I am quite ready to do *whatever* you wish; and, *of course*, keep to what I said, at all risks.

"Ever, my dear Livy, yours, &c.,

"T."

There was a silence after this letter was finished; and, indeed, Livy's voice grew unsteady as she went on. She did not give the latter part with quite the dramatic enthusiasm and spirit with which she had started.

"What does he mean?" said Mrs. Talbot, looking about her.

"O, mamma, dear! to give up your birthday—and the beautiful present you got for him! But," she added, seeing her mother's hopeless face, "you see he *is* coming; yes, mamma, and with all that

pleasure, as he says. O, it is noble of him !"

"But he wishes to stay !—he means to stay. That is, he would think of it—of abandoning us, who are always thinking of him. O, but it was folly—sheer folly ! —and I deserve it."

Livy knew what her mother meant, and was silent.

"This is always the way," Mrs. Talbot went on, "with characters of his sort. Give them liberty but for a day, and they lose their heads. So unkind, too, to give us up for anything—for a song !"

"He will do nothing of the kind," Livy said. "You see it is not dear Beauty who speaks, but some of those people. They have some object in keeping him. He does sing that song so nicely !"

"Some object in keeping him ?" Mrs.

Talbot repeated, mechanically, looking at her daughter. "No doubt; some foolish girl has been flattering him. Well, he must come back in spite of all his Lord Bindleys."

Mrs. Talbot wrote an answer herself that night. It ran :—

"My dearest Beauty,

"We are delighted you are enjoying yourself so much. We long to see you, and we know that you are anxious to be with us. Of course, when they know it is my birthday, they will see you could not stay. Livy and the ponies will be at the station at nine, P.M. We have got a little present, which we know you will be pleased with; and, besides, we have a bit of news to surprise you with. So come quickly, dear, and even before my birthday if you can."

After this letter had been despatched, Livy somehow felt that her mother was very grave and troubled. The mother and daughter had a longer talk that night than usual, and the mother's last words were, "It was a folly for him to go at all. Some foolish girl has been flattering him."

CHAPTER IV.

"THE PROPER THING TO DO."

EVERYONE at Bindley pronounced it was a most "delightful" time—that nothing could be more charming than Lord Bindley himself. That concert, too! It was such a capital notion, that of giving a concert. The versatile Miss Malcolms—who had what is called "a hearty will" for anything, and if necessary would have gone in for prizes at a gymnastic festival; anything, in short, so as to "keep up" matters—were contributing themselves in the most ingenious variety of shapes. "A Duett (Scotch)," by the Sisters Mal-

colm; "A Solo," by the elder Sister Malcolm; "Ditto," by the younger; "Duett (English)," by the Sisters Malcolm. They were, in theatrical parlance, "general utility" girls, and would take any part in social life, from a singing, flirting girl, to a demure maiden. Another gentleman had consented "to take a part" —one Mr. X——, as the French call one of the insignificants, and who indeed has no more need to have a name to trouble others to remember him by, than one of the stage soldiers who carries a banner need be known to the leading player. What was a little thing at first, had grown by a sort of consent into something of great anxiety and interest. "The Concert" was on all minds. They had all set their souls on the hazard of the die. The Woods were on horseback—socially

speaking—day and night. The invitations had gone out, and the rehearsals were in progress. There was Mr. Talbot—but the Woods, inspired, we may suppose, by Mrs. Labouchere, had given out that he was not to be asked or worried; it was to be *assumed* that he could not remain. With a curiously "meaning" manner, Lord Bindley adopted this tone, and gave it to be understood that "he did not wish Talbot to be pressed;" and the servile crowd carried out the instruction with delight—nay, rather bettered it; for they felt they were admitted to a sort of companionship in mystery—a thing in which weak natures hug themselves.

The concert was in every mouth. The invitations were out, and even the local paper had a paragraph about the "dis-

tinguished galaxy of talent now assembled at Bindley."

The Beauty alone did not share in the general enthusiasm. He went "moping" about—gloomy, uncomfortable, and much troubled in mind.

The post brought him Mrs. Talbot's letter, and he read it with fresh discomfort.

"I knew it," he said to himself. "Just like them. *Think of nothing but themselves* —so selfish!"

This from him to those two faithful, hard-working women, whose hands had been under his feet!

"All my little enjoyments interfered with in this way. Of course, I'll have to give it up. It's always the way—always!"

Never was man so treated, never did

schoolboy so pout and glower; and in this mood did Mrs. Labouchere find him. He told her, reluctantly.

"What, they won't let you off?"

"O, no. She expects me;—that is, she doesn't seem to see any need of my staying. I'm sure I don't understand why."

"O, if you don't, we can't," she said, laughing. "Your case is a very hard one, Mr. Talbot. You should get up an agitation, and lay it all before the public, who, I am sure, would support you."

"I am sure they would," the Beauty answered, with perfect gravity. "The only thing I have set my heart on—that I would give my eyes for!"

"It is very unfortunate; but they can't be so hard-hearted. Did you put it well before them?"

There was a sort of scoffing tone in all this; but it led him on.

"Yes, of course I did. Any one else would have agreed."

"And they won't allow you?—won't give their consent? I don't know which to wonder at most—their stern despotism, or your unswerving obedience. Why, such a husband as you should reside at the British Museum, to be shown to the good rustics from the country."

The Beauty coloured.

"O, it is very easy to turn anything into ridicule—very."

"Turn into ridicule?" she said, with a sharp, stern look, from which he shrank. "Pray, what do you mean? I would only do that to an enemy. Do you mean that I have been turning *you* into ridicule?"

The Beauty stammered, "O, not exactly."

"Not exactly!" she repeated. "But yes, exactly. Then let me explain, Mr. Talbot, since you do not understand. What I meant was, that it seemed a great contrast to the behaviour of our habitual lords and masters, who do not submit so implicitly to the rule of a wife and daughter. It seems a sort of phenomenon. Even at a distance their authority seems to extend. It is quite interesting to see it."

"O, there is no authority, and that sort of thing," said the Beauty, colouring. "You are so clever, you know, and you like hitting at people."

"Like hitting at people! Well, *you* should not say that! What I said was all in your own interest, to save you from remarks and speeches, and from

furnishing amusement. However, I meet the usual return. That stroke was a little unkind of you, Mr. Talbot."

"I didn't mean—indeed no," he said, in confusion. "But what I wanted to say was, I could do as I liked—like every man. As to their laughing—"

"Laughing!—oh, no, I did not say that. But I merely meant a friendly part. However, I shall give no more advice now to any one."

"Why do you speak in that way?" said the Beauty, pettishly. "I am sure I can't please every one. O, I should so like to stay! But then they will make such a fuss and worry. They take things so seriously, really a man doesn't know what to do."

"Oh, a man *could* know," said Mrs. Labouchere, seriously; "if he only thought a little, he would not need anyone's

advice. In the present instance you are Lord Bindley's guest. He is your host—he is a man of rank, and he asks this trifle. I tell you freely you are bound to put aside any little domestic matters about birthdays, and the like. It seems childish and old-fashioned. You asked me; so I speak plainly."

The Beauty had some very miserable thoughts, saying to himself it was cruel and scandalous, and that he wouldn't put up with it.

Mr. Wood now came dashing up, and flung himself from his foaming steed—that fanciful one we have spoken of.

"Here, Talbot," he said, "I am sending to the printers. Here, will you sing or not? Yes or no."

"O, I am sure I should so like—but I can't say at—"

"O, then, you won't. We can't keep the bills waiting. And by the way I must tell you, Talbot, his Lordship thinks he has not been treated fairly in this matter. Every one else helps cheerfully and makes sacrifices, but you are making all this fuss. Best go to him openly, and tell him your wife won't allow it—"

"There is nothing of the kind," said the Beauty, ready to cry almost. "That is some story they have got up. I am not such a fool. I could stay at any moment."

"Then show that you can stay; and that will dispose of all such ill-natured remarks," said she.

The Beauty was quite "put out." He had a good deal of the ill-nature of a monkey, or of the spoiled child

"You say that rather spitefully, as if

you wanted to annoy me; but I could give a reason for it, Mrs. Labouchere."

Her haughty, cold stare, accompanied with a drawing up of the figure, he did not soon forget.

"Go on," she said; "explain what you mean."

"O nothing," he faltered almost; "indeed, nothing."

"That is, you would withdraw your speech. As you please, Mr. Talbot. There are some who would not quite like that story to be revived. However, the *intention* was not generous on your side, Mr. Talbot—a little unkind, as return for my taking interest in your concerns. Sing and compose your ballads for the future. Give a thousand 'last and lingering smiles.' I shall never interfere."

With this she passed on, leaving the

Beauty dreadfully ashamed of himself, and full of compunction. Up comes Lord Bindley.

"Oh, Talbot, sorry you're leaving us; can't get leave, eh? Never mind these fellows laughing a bit. You're quite right to be a decent husband; and don't mind us now,—for, what do you say, Miss Malcolms have found us out a tenor, and they are going to telegraph for him?"

A thousand emotions rushed on the Beauty. He felt himself called on to act. It was absurd, ridiculous—putting him into such a position; he could hardly forgive himself for having put *himself* into such a position. All doubt was gone, and, without hesitation, he answered,—

"O, I intend to stay, if you will allow me; and do my best for the concert."

"Capital!" said Lord Bindley. "Now everything is going well. Ah, here's Wood, just in time. Well, he'll stay, Wood."

Wood had his hand full of papers.

"Ah, I knew he would. Then come this way, Talbot, and give me the exact titles of your songs for the printers. His lordship will excuse you."

"Yes, go with Wood."

It was delightful—too exciting. Going with Wood, he set down the "'Last and Lingering Smile,' *ballad;* music by A. Talbot, Esq.," his pulse fluttering.

There was a sensation through the house—a kind of diffused joy. (So it seemed to the Beauty.)

"We hear you have consented to stay, Talbot. His lordship feels quite indebted to you," said one, coming up to him

later. Then, dropping his voice,—"We shan't forget it to you; and you have done the proper thing. I said it to him."

The Beauty began to consider himself quite a hero. He was in a tumult of delight. Everybody was so good, so kind, so charming. This dandified Rip Van Winkle had awakened from his long sleep, and was walking through the village—wondering, and delighted at all he saw. Here was Mendelssohn Jackson, organist and local teacher, to whom his lordship had entrusted the direction of the concert, looking for him. Mendelssohn Jackson was a composer himself, and had written "The Soldier's Grave," with other ballads well-known—among his pupils. Would Mr. Talbot favour him with half an hour, to try over his song?

Mendelssohn Jackson was a character

in his way, whose aim in life was to strike out some obsequious compromise between the gentleman and the music-master—that odiously low designation. He drew the line between himself and the common fellows of the profession, "the grinders," as he pleasantly called "the men that carry the hod, you know." Had he been willing to carry the hod, he might have made a good deal of money; but his wish to be considered an equal of genteel people made him submit to some heavy sacrifices, and to a system of heavy sacrifices—these persons having condescension enough to avail themselves of his gratuitous services. He had been delighted when Lord Bindley had placed the whole affair under his direction, as so many of his pupils learned, when he looked hurriedly at his watch.

"Bless me—must be off to Bindley—take a fly—pay the man double—some good talent there—a voice that I could make something of. Clever girls, those Malcolms."

His demeanour to Mr. Talbot was characteristic.

"What is this?" he said, at the piano, opening the music leisurely. "'Give him a lingering smile.' Tum-tum-ti — nice, and pretty—melody flows. You should have a diminished seventh there, that would have brought you back again. Very nice! There, of course, you have the burden. I can tell you, there are some of the hod men, in the big village yonder, get their twenty guineas—for—queer stuff, compared with this. Mortar, eh?—and bad mortar, too. As for that woman, Florizel—not music—not a note

of music in all she writes. Well, let us see. Suppose we begin now."

And the Beauty went through his ditty, to a *sotto voce* accompaniment.

"Fairly done. Open your mouth."

Then Mendelssohn Jackson got out his gold pencil-case.

"Think we could do a little macadamising here. There, that turn would be more the thing, more singable, you know. There again, there seems to be something *short*. We must make sense, you know. Let me see—hm—that will be better."

"O but, you know, that spoils the whole effect. I didn't mean *that*," said the Beauty, much hurt.

"Well, as you like; you know it must balance. However, I dare say it won't be noticed. The rustics haven't wit enough to find it out."

The director of the concert, later, spoke with different voices of this production. It was fair and "singable," without pretension, and Talbot was a gentlemanly fellow. To others of his friends, he inveighed against the scandal of setting him down—him, Mendelssohn Jackson—to play that fellow's trash. "The twaddle that he had strummed out on his piano." To his lordship he spoke in high commendation, especially when his lordship praised himself. "Yes, I think I know a good thing; the moment I heard his voice I picked him out. I said, that will take, that will hit with the public. Yet I have never gone to school in music, eh, Jackson! What I want is to show 'em that I can get up the best music in the country when I like!"

After this excitement, the responsibility

of the heavy step he had taken began to weigh on the Beauty. At all events, he would dismiss it for that day. That night there was the rehearsal. Greater excitement still in the Grand Hall when a few of the tenants' wives and daughters, and all the servants were admitted. It went off admirably. Our Beauty was in Paradise—soft light, softer clouds seemed to be floating about him; everybody was kind, good, charming, and romantic. He was the old self back again, the same figure of his youth, which he had often looked back on, and which he thought had faded out like an old photograph. He sang his song "splendidly" to muttered accompaniment from Mendelssohn Jackson! "take time—now collect yourself, softer, softer, &c." Sometimes the eminent director stopped a piece in the

middle, "Never do, never do. Try back to—let me see—to five, six, seven bars, to where the *tempo primo* comes in."

Thus interrupted in the Scotch duet, the sisters Malcolm began to show signs of ill blood. "Now, hurry on. Won't do, excuse me. Not the thing at all. I heard those Bosioni girls sing it at Exeter Hall; a little more of the 'setting one's cap' style, you know. Now try again."

Again were the sisters pursuing a tortuous path "in thirds" like two performers on velocipedes, twisting and winding in parallel lines. Again Mr. Jackson jerked the rein. "Won't do, still." One of the young ladies' cheeks began to glow—the younger's nose. "We had better not sing it at all," one said; "or please let us sing it our way."

"With all my heart," and thereupon

Mr. Jackson allowed his hands to stray very wildly over the keys, now taking a spasm forward like a shying horse, and dragging the young ladies with him; now "jibbing" unaccountably, and not to be got on at all. It was always a foolish thing to offend Mendelssohn Jackson, people said, "he had so much in his power."

Lord Bindley took great credit for the proceedings, and with a wise air, "though he hadn't a note of music in him," declared that he was determined to have good music at that house. But our Beauty, thrilled and fluttered like a young *débutante*—he was "the new tenor" whom Lord Bindley had found out.

After it was over, Mrs. Labouchere was the first to come up and congratulate the blushing performer. "You were angry

with me, to-day, because I spoke candidly, and in your interest. You *set me down*, too."

"I!" said the delighted Beauty. "I set you down! No, indeed."

No, indeed. How many years was it since the Beauty had been accused of setting any one down? Most acceptable flattery.

"But you liked the song—it was your choosing."

"Liked it!" repeated Mrs. Labouchere, without adding a word more; perhaps the briefest, as the most satisfactory, shape of commendation known. It is all in the inflection, and does admirably for the common chroniclers of small beer, though the woman of intelligence coldly asks, "Well, but what did you think of it?"

"I knew you would not be sorry to stay. O, you could hardly have done anything else."

"You think so?" said the Beauty.

"O, not *I*, but everyone. Lord Bindley seems to think you have laid him under an obligation. Of course, something must be put to his vanity; for he boasts that he has discovered a new tenor, which he could not have done had you gone away. You sang well to-night."

The delighted Beauty looked at her with great interest and gratitude.

"How kind of you to say this, to encourage me!"

"We know, too, what a little sacrifice you have made," she added, smiling; "not only in giving up your treat at home, but in boldly facing a certain sort of greeting that awaits you there."

Uneasiness came into his face.

"I am sure I don't care," he said; "it is nothing to me."

She shook her head.

"I am a woman, and know what I should think of such treatment. But were I a man, I know what I should do."

This Beauty could be played upon like a fiddle.

"What? Tell me — do," he said, eagerly.

"What all men of the world—statesmen, soldiers—do when they have something awkward or disagreeable before them—do it boldly, as if it was a matter of course. I naturally do not understand what special relations you may have to your family, but I may assume that you enjoy average liberty; that you do not live a Polish husband under a

Russian wife; that in this nineteenth century there is not in England to be found so comic a state of things as that the head of a house could not outstay his leave a day——"

Again the Beauty was blushing and getting flustered.

"No," she went on; "you have shown that this cannot be said. Some might have yielded to avoid feminine reproaches—things to be always deprecated. Shall I tell you a little passage from my own history? My husband was a soldier, and when I was first married I thought he loved me so, that I could make him do what I pleased. One day he was absent from dinner. I waited and waited until it came to ten o'clock at night, and then he returned. I burst out with a storm of reproaches and upbraidings, which he

took most good-humouredly. This only inflamed me more, and I reproached him haughtily and bitterly. Then he looked at me sternly. 'And what was the reason?' I said. 'A good one,' he said bluntly; 'my will and pleasure. That must do you now. Had you let me speak at first, I should have told you everything, and made you all apologies.' From that moment he was my master. You may smile at my telling you this; but I should like you to think me your friend. And as you have saved us from a difficulty here, we should not like you to have any difficulty in return — though it is an imaginary one."

The Beauty was touched by this sympathy.

"You see," he said, "I was only thinking of the fuss they might make.

Every man hates fuss. But as for doing as I like——"

"O dear, no," she said; "don't twist my words that way. Do as you like, and then I desert you. Savages, Hottentots, do as they like, and a certain sort of husband. No, don't do as you like. But Mr. Talbot knows well the *juste milieu*."

CHAPTER V.

THE GREAT CONCERT.

When she had gone, the Beauty went to his room, and entering with great importance, said aloud, "Really, most unreasonable!" On the table was a letter—a letter from his Livy.

"My darling Beauty,

"This is a private letter from your own Livy, and of which dear mamma knows nothing. I fear those people may not let you go, and indeed I do not wonder, as our dear Beauty can make himself so

agreeable. But she has set her heart on your being back; and O! it would so mortify her if you were not with her on her birthday. She only thinks of you, and if you but saw the lovely present she has got, as a surprise! It will delight you to see it. But I know my dear papa will do what is right, and *keep to his promise*, and he will recollect that this was a sort of condition, and I have just told mamma I would stake my poor life on dear papa's keeping to his word.

"Your own,

"LIVY."

The Beauty tossed this down fretfully.

"They will worry me to death!".

Alas! the indiscreet little Livy had set down a very foolish expression. Made it a condition! The little boy would not

have been *allowed* out for his holiday if they had thought this!

"This is rather too good. I am not *quite* a child. As Mrs. Labouchere says, this is getting a little too much."

He sat down and wrote promptly:—

"DEAREST LIVY,

"I have just come from the rehearsal. It went off magnificently. I am afraid you and your mother do not exactly see how I stand. Lord Bindley is my host, and there is a certain courtesy due to him when he makes a request. If you were here, you would see this quite clearly. It surely would be ridiculous, and it looks absurd, that I should be *ordered home* to the day, like a schoolboy. It is really very unfortunate, and I have done my best; but I am not called on to appear

boorish or *churlish*, or to spoil the whole thing. My song at the rehearsal was the great success of the night. Lord Bindley calls me *his tenor*, and says he found me out. Everybody is so nice and kind, and seems to take such an interest in me. If I were to put my eyes upon sticks, my dear Livy, I could not leave this; so this is final, and there is no use writing me *any worrying* letters.

"Ever yours,

"T."

He thought this an "uncommon good letter," and went down again to post it.

Mr. Hardman, who still led his pariah life, and, in truth, never had spent so dismal a time, came to him obsequiously.—"You sing admirably, Mr. Talbot. His lordship is quite pleased. I tell you what,

you must come and stop with us at the The Towers, and—er—we should try and get up some music. We could ask those Miss Malcolms." The Beauty was too happy not to promise all and everything. He was actually "getting engagements," and there are people among the amateurs who go about the country with their little songs, quite delighted when their services are secured. But the musical amateur world is a microcosm in itself.

Mr. Hardman's tactics were highly characteristic, and most people, after a few minutes' conversation found it get round rather to "The Towers," on which the owner would expatiate—then, trapped into a conventional expression of praise, would be surprised by an invitation—"We must have you down at The Towers, if you will do me that honour. We shall find

means to amuse you, or rather, give you the means, and let you amuse yourself. That's my way." As for the host, he openly expressed his dislike. "What on earth made me ask that dreadful man—he is making life a burden. He sticks to me like a burr." It was after dinner, however, when the ladies were gone, that Mr. Hardman was unavoidable. Fixed in his chair, a wooden figure, a white metal cravat about his throat, he dealt in strange pedantic discourse; extracts from newspapers. "I see in the *Times*, my lord;" —"The *Times*, says, my lord," until at last Lord Robert christened him "Old Times," by a happy flight of humour.

At home they were in a flutter of expectation. Mrs. Talbot was nervous and "put out." "He will come, of course, dearest," Livy said.

"Of course he will," said her mother haughtily; "have I not required him. He must."

It was a restless day, dragging its slow length along, when towards evening a strange instinct, which with affection amounts almost to forecast, made her go down to the post-office just before the post came in. There she found her father's letter. It came like a shock upon her. "Then he will stay," she said. "Oh! what dreadful thing is coming!"

A spectator might have smiled; but in their little world every little mist became a cloud. His little flower for the prisoner was more precious than the gardens of a palace. She determined not to tell her mother of the news, and this "not telling" is the favourite resource of gentle minds; some shift or device—anything

that will put off evil news, even a day—the bill-drawer's resource. All that evening the mother made no remark; but when they were going to bed, she said, with a deep sigh, "He will not come. I know he will not."

"O, he will, dearest. I am sure he will. At the last moment he will change, and—"

The mother turned on her. "You know something. What is he to change from? Tell me. You have heard."

Livy, poor little domestic hare, driven to her form, had to give up her letter. Her mother read it, returned it to her calmly, and after a pause, said:

"This is not his doing, some wretched girl has been flattering him. *His* singing, indeed!" but she checked herself; even between the two she felt that old affectionate deception must be carried out.

Meanwhile, at Bindley, the great night came round. Workmen had been turned into the large dining-room, who had erected a platform at the farther end. The large "auditorium," so Mendelssohn Jackson had christened it, was filled up with rows upon rows of chairs. Flowers had been arranged in front by "his lordship's gardener," and the whole had quite a theatrical air. Lord Robert, who was inclined to be merry with the whole, remarked,—"I declare," he reported, "such a set of human steers; such agricultural broadbacks! I was looking at every man's shoulder to see the brand."

About Bindley there *was* rather a cattle country. At eight punctually, his lordship and party entered the hall, and took their places in the "reserved seats" to a round of applause. Then the programmes were

distributed, of which we are enabled to subjoin a copy.

BINDLEY CONCERT HALL.

PATRON—THE LORD BINDLEY.

GRAND CONCERT.

PARTE PRIMA.

"BLACKSMITH'S CHORUS," "Il Trovatore." *Verdi.*
(Compressed by MENDELSSOHN JACKSON.)

DUETT.—Scotch. "Cam hame wi' the Kye."
THE MISSES MALCOLM.

SOLO. "Il Balen" . . . . . *Verdi.*
MR. BAKER.
(Accompanied by MR. MENDELSSOHN JACKSON.)

SOLO. "Bindlina Valse" . . *Mendelssohn Jackson.*
(Aria con variazione, compostà è dedicatà al S. E. il Conde di BINDLEY.)

CORO. "Dal tuo Stellato" . . . . . *Rossini.*

PARTE SECONDA.

CORO. "Blow, Gentle Gales" . . . . *Bishop.*
Soli by the MISSES MALCOLM, MR. TALBOT, MR. BAKER, and MR. MENDELSSOHN JACKSON.

SOLO. "Good bye, Sweetheart" . . . . *Bishop.*
MISS GEORGINA MALCOLM.

SOLO.—Piano. "Caprice è Ricambole."
Dédié à son élève, L'Honorable GIUDETTA BINDLEY, par MENDELSSOHN JACKSON.

SOLO. "He Gave one Last and Lingering Smile" *Talbot.*
MR. TALBOT.

DUETT. "Now Glides Our Pretty Bark" . *H. Frebles.*
THE MISSES MALCOLM.

SOLO. "Let me Like a Soldier Fall." . . . *Wallace.*
(Transposed by MENDELSSOHN JACKSON.)
MISS MALCOLM.

GRANDE FINALE.—"GOD SAVE THE QUEEN."

Such was the bill of fare fluttering in everyone's fingers. No wonder it was said, "You could hardly know it from a real concert." From it might be gathered the kind and unsparing way in which Mr. Mendelssohn Jackson had thrown his whole soul into the performance. He carried it all through, arranging, compressing, transposing, fitting everything to everybody. How graceful, too, the little compliments to the noble host and hostess: "things" just struck off at a heat. And after he had remarked at one of the last rehearsals, "Won't do, this; a want of go and rattle. The thing drags somehow:" he then went home, and knocked off the little effects in question.

Talking of the likeness to real concerts, it was the more remarkable when the singing ladies and gentlemen came in a

sort of procession, "exactly like the professionals," rustling in silks, and sat in a row. In this they were carefully drilled by Mr. Mendelssohn Jackson, who made them copy the precedent of the "Norwich Festival" concerts, where he had once assisted as "counter tenor." Thus it is, and by exercise of a little thought, that a sort of realism is imparted to what would otherwise be a loose and incoherent performance. Well might Mr. Jackson say afterwards, that "not for five times five guineas" would he go through the harrassing wear and tear of soul and body undergone during that week.

That sneerer, Lord Robert, was almost ungentlemanly in his remarks on the large share which the director took in the permance. "He *is* the concert. Take it up and down, cross wise, any way, it is all one tune—Jackson." And indeed during

the performance Jackson was everywhere; now beating time; now making a sudden dart from the piano at a piece of music; setting all going, setting all right. Next to this indefatigable actor came the Misses Malcolm, who laboured in the heats and dews, and "worked like horses." Amazing was it to see their self-possession before that audience, their boldness in standing up well to the front, their perfect coolness and *aplomb*. The courage of women is indeed truer courage than that of men. The two sisters came forward smiling, clad the same, each with a pink scarf garterwise across their chests, to sing their piquant Scotch duett. Who did not recal the words?—

"The night is braw and bonnie,
The moon is shining clear,
And I gae forth sae gaily,
For my laddie is near,
For my laddie is near."

The arch way in which they nodded and looked over their shoulders was truly piquant, and led to a rapturous encore. The spirit, too, with which Miss Malcolm gave her dashing song, "Let me like a Soldier fall," at the end waving her music as if it was a sword, led to a deserved recal. As for Mendelssohn Jackson's own little "things," how he set down the music stand, threw open the piano, wheeled it to an angle, drew in his chair, looked up to the ceiling a moment in thought, as if to recover lost inspiration; such tokens of genius were all noted and admired. But we all know how Mendelssohn Jackson and his brethren behave on such occasions.

The first chord "dug" vigorously into the clay of the piano; the gay canter to the top; the pause; the gentle riding

motion of the figure; the sweetly smiling and bowing in pleasant recognition to the back of his hands as they go through their labour; their leaps into the air; their clearing of each other, like clowns on all fours, who are fond of going over each other in this way: have we not seen this at a hundred concerts of more pretension than the Bindley one? But we are approaching the event of the night.

Pleased as they had been, that rustic audience had been instructed that the noble host had something in reserve, with which he desired they should be far more pleased. "The new tenor!" How that sound fluttered about.

"They are asking which is the new tenor; to point him out; and of course I did," said Mrs. Labouchere, coming up to him about five minutes before his song.

He was sitting in "the green room"—so called—not nervous, but in a dreaming state of excitement.

"You will do it admirably, I see," she went on; "and if you bring the house down, I shall claim some share in the credit. I think it was I who urged you—urged you—well, on your wild career."

"Indeed, yes," said the Beauty, warmly. "But for you I should not be here now."

A curious smile answered and encouraged him.

"You have been very kind and good, and taken much trouble with me. *Indeed*, Mrs. Labouchere, I shall not forget it."

At such and at kindred moments—as during an amateur play—we can take the whole world to our bosom. Every one is "my dear boy" or girl, and a certain *épanchement de cœur* is pardonable. There

was even a tremble in the Beauty's voice as he spoke. She looked majestic and splendid, in velvet and diamonds; haughty as Grisi in "Norma;" despising the whole thing, save the one solitary portion in which she had interested herself.

"I have come from my room solely to hear you sing," she went on, "I feel such a restless interest in it. There, here comes that man to tell you all is ready. Now, courage. *Think of me* at your first bar."

It was Mr. Jackson tramping in, "Where's Mr. Talbot? Where's your song? Audience is waiting. Come." And taking it up, he led the way.

When the Bindley audience saw the soft features, the divided black hair, and the glossy, oiled moustache of the Beauty, his faultless and lady-like linen, and even inhaled the cloud of perfume that floated be

fore him, they were filled with enthusiasm, and greeted the interesting performer with a round of enthusiastic applause. It was really the same as when, after town profusely "billed" and newspaper-paragraphed, and a shower of puffs, and talk and whispers, and suggested disappointment, we have seen, and often seen, the well-heralded artist enter on the platform. Then we see, as it were, bills and puffs and whispers all concentrated in the bowing figure before us, and it becomes heroic. So was it with the Beauty. He was the hero of the night.

Mendelssohn Jackson, after a few careless chords, struck into the symphony, playing the air with intense expression, only drawing it out to a degree that made the Beauty uncomfortable. Then the Beauty began, faltering a little at first,

but getting courage. His voice was clear and tender, though, like that of conscience, "a still, small one." The teaching and tutoring of Mendelssohn Jackson, half contemptuous, had not been thrown away. He really gave a gentlemanlike, inoffensive, and in parts, effective rendering of the famous ballad; and when, after hovering suspended over the edge, for the prescribed time—

"One last and lin-G'RING . . . ."

he finally leaped and lighted on his feet, in the word "SMILE," on which he "died off" softly and sadly, down came a volley of applause, with an irresistible demand for an encore; for which, indeed, the signal came from his lordship, who was seen smiling, pleased, and delighted, and heard to whisper to his neighbour, "I

knew he'd do." Club friends in town wondered afterwards as they heard Bindley laying down the law on musical matters, with a very critical air; a person who up to that had about as much music in him as "a carpenter's saw in good work." It was a sweet and most delightful moment! — paradisal! — something to have dreams of, something that might never come back again.

So it seemed to him that night when the concert was over, when he was receiving the gentle spray of compliments showered on him, figure succeeding figure. "Such a treat, Mr. Talbot." "Such a charming voice." One such note kept pouring into his ear.

"I cannot tell you the effect produced; everybody is talking of it. They should give *me* a testimonial, surely. Ah, if I

had only known you long ago! What time wasted, what glories lost! Here you are a public man. A change, indeed, from the hermit-like life you have been leading. How many years now?"

"Indeed, it is a long, long time," said the Beauty.

"I often think how many men of genius are thus forced to live a mole-like existence—underground, as it were. It is not right—it should not be—it is wasting the precious blessings of heaven. Be a monk, if you please; but then do it regularly: choose your convent, and get professed. But do not act after this lay fashion," said Mrs. Labouchere.

Strange thoughts were flitting through the Beauty's mind. Yes, he had led a curious, unsatisfactory life. How was it that he was so misunderstood at home?

Here, the very first opportunity of his enlargement, he was raised to the pinnacle of social celebrity.

Now comes up Lord Bindley, rather excited.

"My dear Talbot, a word with you; we must not let this drop. Having found a mine—ha, ha!—I am not going to let it go unworked. I have a royalty in you, my dear fellow — ha, ha! See, we are going to repeat this concert; it has been really such a great success, and you are re-engaged for Wednesday. So no thoughts of going home."

The Beauty's cheeks flushed with pleasure.

"See what it is to become a public man," said Mrs. Labouchere. "Publicity has its duties as well as its rights. There will be no escaping from this."

The Beauty began excuses, but they would not be listened to. It was charming — delightful — too exquisite. Kindly faces on all sides crowding round; all pressing, entreating — *imploring*, was it? —that he should remain. What could he do, a public man? In his place, what would any one do? It was wrung from him: he would see in the morning. He would do what he could. Sweet, sweetest night!

CHAPTER VI.

UNDECIDED.

A WEARY day, though, for the two ladies far away. It drew on heavily from morn till midday, from midday till dusk, still with hopes that he would at last return. They clung to that hope, as everyone does in that wonderful way for which there is no analogy — from the sentenced criminal downwards. At last it grew dark, and drew on to the hour when the concert was beginning. They did not venture on the step of sending the carriage to the station, for they knew a porter could be sent up to the house for it. But

the long night dragged on; all Livy's little shifts and devices in the way of excuse or defence of the culprit, broke down.

"You don't think," said her mother, almost passionately, "that I mind his staying a day, or days even, at any country house? I am not such a foolish creature. But I know what this means—of what it is the certain beginning. His poor head has been turned by some girl's praise. You see how he spoke of his song."

"Indeed, no," said Livy, warmly; "he will tell the whole thing to us to-morrow morning. You will see, dear. Oh, it is a trifle—not worth thinking of; fifty gentlemen would do the same. When he comes in the morning—"

"Come! Oh, yes, he must come in the morning. But who knows?"

Livy looked a little wild at this supposition, and it attended her to her room that night, and waited on her during the night, like an ugly sight. What if he should not come in the morning?

This may all seem ludicrous enough—a social puddle in a storm; but from these two hearts proceeded two fibres that joined the Beauty's noble figure, and which any motion of his caused to vibrate, and almost to jangle.

In the morning—a Sunday morning—there was but the one train by which he could arrive, about noon. It was an uneasy church time, and when it was over Livy's ponies were got out, and trotted her down to the station. But the train came, and the Beauty, as we know, was not in it. From her seat, with fluttering heart, she saw the doors open and flap,

and give up their passenger or two, and the train move on. She saw it was not the Beauty that was left, and her soul sank. This was alarming; and, half terrified, she turned her ponies away from the house, for she had not courage to face her mother. On the road she saw her lover and worshipper coming gaily along. His face fell also.

"I was certain he would come to-day. What can be over him?"

(He, too, had been drawn into the little microcosm)

"But what are we to do?" she cried. "I cannot go back with this news."

The young man paused a few seconds.

"I was going to propose something, only he might not like it. Here is rather an important letter come in for my father, which he ought to see at once. I was

about sending a special messenger; but—"

"O, if you would—the very thing!" she cried eagerly, leaping to his meaning. "Do go quick, and speak to him. Tell him he must return to us—or find out the reason. But don't—don't hurt his pride, or let him think—"

"I understand; leave it to me."

"She is not well, and is so nervous always, that this is certain—"

"I understand," he said again. "You will find me a willing and clever ambassador. Leave it to me. I am just going to the train, and shall be home late to-night."

At Bindley that morning, there was quite a clatter of delighted talk and congratulation. Bindley had, indeed, up to this time been a kind of old-fashioned

house—"behind the time," and with a bad name through the country, as being "the most stupid place going;" and the gala was a sort of surprise and delight. This feeling was duly quickened by the indefatigable Wood's, who had been, as it were, in the saddle for four and twenty hours. They were like the man in the French theatre, who gets up a *claque* for his wife, appears on the first tier at the back of a box, with an obstreperous "Bravo!" and vigorous fusilade of clapping, then hurries away higher, and repeats his applause. It was impossible to resist the zeal of these Woods; and every one was convinced that this had been an almost national success, and should be in the *Times*.

Mr. Talbot came down from the delightful seventh heaven. Already the hum-

drums of domestic life, the poor rusticity of the women—seemed very tedious and fretting. People ought to take a larger and wholesome view. He seemed to regard them more as a statesman might a nursery and its little commotions, such as Master Jackey's having stolen a pot of jam. But what came back on him oftenest was that speech of his true friend, Mrs. Labouchere, whose kindness and encouragement he should never forget. A generous, clever woman: clever, because she had seized on his true character; generous, because she had the magnanimity to forget the past. It is surprising once a bad step has been taken, how the next impulse is not to palliate its effect, but, with a sort of desperation, to widen the breach.

The feeling is, in vulgar phrase, "In

for a penny, in for a pound;" and so the Beauty, shutting his eyes, as it were, found it impossible to resist the sweet pressure put upon him, and thought it best to leave things as they were. "Time enough to-morrow to write to 'them.'" For, alas! such was the shape they were taking for him — a sort of "party," "they,"—those who were keeping him down in obscurity.

It was a sunshiny winter's morning, and these thoughts came floating on him as he sat in the church, with the whole distinguished party from Bindley. Did he fancy that the soft glances of the young girls were stealing over the edges of their books to have a secret gaze at the hero of last night? He felt as if it was his home. When he returned, he found his way to the "concert hall," still in the

pleasant disorder of last night—chairs disarranged, bills strewn about, music all scattered. There was where he stood and sang. Someone fluttering by, stopped and looked in.

"It was a very pleasant night—something to think of," said she—it was Mrs. Labouchere.

He answered, with enthusiasm,—

"O, was it not charming?"

"But you must stay for Wednesday. There is to be a new programme. You will have to practise. Will you be once more advised by me? Though, indeed, I have no reason to advise. I daresay you think poorly of me for being so forgetful."

"How?" he asked. "O, Mrs. Talbot!"

"I have lost my poor husband: she had nearly made me lose him once before.

Did she ever tell you the device which she used to shipwreck my happiness? Not likely, I should think."

"No, indeed," said the Beauty, looking at her with interest; "but we must forget all that. We must be very intimate in future. Leave it to me. She is very sensible; or even if she is not inclined, you and I are great friends. O yes, we must see a great deal of you."

She laughed.

"O, *we* must, must we? Are you certain of that? Take care you are not going beyond your powers. You know you can only speak for one; and as for *me*, she has reasons for not liking me. She cannot easily forget *that*, and she will not let you forget it. You must obey, Mr. Talbot."

She left him with a sort of scornful smile.

The Beauty, much put out, determined he would not write that day.

In the evening, just before dinner, a carriage drove up, and his lordship came to look for Mr. Hardman.

"Mr. Hardman,"—O, that he would say "Hardman!" but he never would—"your son has come with some papers, and wishes to see you. He seems a nice young fellow. I have asked him to dine with us."

"O dear, no, my lord, no need," said the other, never relishing the distribution of common blessings to his own family; a protest of which his host took no notice.

The father and son met and transacted the business.

"Here, you," said the father, "you need not be hanging on here. You can't stay on that sort of invitation."

"But he has made it such a point, father—and I have agreed."

"Overrunning the place in this way! Better send for all the servants, and quarter my family here at once."

There was other business, too, the youth would like to have introduced, but he saw that the humour his father was in would not admit of it. However, this was a reason to make him yield to what was wished.

He at once sought Mr. Talbot, and found him at the piano by himself "composing." A brilliant idea had struck him: he would like to put it into shape. How charming would it be to have an entirely new song, "composed for the occasion"—and again, "words *selected* by Mrs. Labouchere"—the whole "respectfully inscribed to the Lord Bindley." He was in a fever till he put it in execution. What

a surprise and delight for the crowd! Mrs. Labouchere, in her languid contemptuous way, did select: that is, took down one of the old rose-silk-bound annuals for which our grandfathers paid their guinea cheerfully—"Amulet," "Charm," "Bijou," and the rest—and laid her finger at random on one of Milkton Monsey's lyrics—then, alas! a curly-headed darling, writing with a jewelled pen,

"Yes, his was love sincere and true."

Young Hardman approached him with an almost tender reverence. He saw him now in quite a different light. He was awe-stricken at the important labours of his future father.

"O, how d'ye do," the Beauty said, fretfully. "Beg pardon, I must finish

this phrase." And he wrote it down on the music paper, first trying the chords. This was the Beauty's fashion of composition.

"I saw them," said the young man, nervously, "this morning."

"They?—who? O, yes," said the Beauty, turning to his music paper.

"They were so dreadfully disappointed yesterday; and they had such a splendid present waiting. Miss Olivia saved up her money."

"O, it couldn't be," said the other; "out of the question. One has duties to one's host. They can't understand the thing. One must give and take."

"Ah, yes, to be sure. But, now, Mr. Talbot, I can go back and tell them you shall be home to-morrow."

"Indeed you cannot. Never was any

one so worried. There is another concert on Wednesday, and I *must* wait."

"O, you could not! They will be so hurt. I know she will be so anxious—and you promised them, and it will look so like a slight. You love them, as I know, and would not wound them. I assure you Mrs. Talbot feels very acutely, and," added young Mr. Hardman, artfully, seeing the other's hesitation, "I don't know what she may do."

A vision rose before the alarmed Beauty of her driving up to fetch him. In that case he knew he could make no resistance: not all the Mrs. Laboucheres and Lord Bindleys in the world could save him. But then came the vision of the delightful and entrancing night to be repeated. It was too seductive, and he could not

give it up. It was unfair, unreasonable to ask him. He said, suddenly—

"O, I can't do it, really; and I am glad you have come, as you will see yourself how things stand here. Ladies can't understand. I'm really not a child, to come back to the day and hour, and all that sort of thing. So tell them, please, I'll be back on Thursday. And see here, now, Hardman, you are a reasonable fellow, and see that the thing can't be done—don't you?"

It was a temptation for the young man. A little adhesion here would have forwarded his interests. But he answered—

"Of course, I have no business to interfere; but I *do* think they will be much hurt if you do not go back."

Going out to see after his carriage, he met Lord Bindley. That nobleman, who

thought him a cheerful, pleasant fellow, and a strange contrast to his father, took him to show him the place. Towards dinner time, when the young fellow had gone, his lordship was heard asking for "Talbot." Aide-de-camp Wood found him speedily.

"See here, Talbot," said his lordship, "we must try and get on without you. It isn't fair to keep you here, and it mustn't be."

The Beauty was so confounded that he knew not what to answer.

"Mustn't be," he repeated. "Yes, we must turn you out—send you home to Mrs. Talbot. I'm not about to come between man and wife. And, indeed, if I had known, I shouldn't have kept you even for the other night."

The Beauty was a gentleman born and

bred, and with all his folly had a certain tact.

"By all means, Lord Bindley, since you wish. I was only staying to help your concert. I shall go to-morrow."

"O, I don't mean that, my dear Talbot, and we are all so much obliged to you. But I think, you know, it would be better on the whole. A great disappointment to us all."

Lord Bindley was himself rather a weak nobleman, as, indeed, his violent taking up of that music might imply. That evening Mrs. Labouchere came to him. "My dear lord," she said; "what is this we hear? You are letting our Beauty go."

"O yes," said he, with mystery, "it is quite proper, and all that. You see, his wife does not quite like it, and he has

been playing truant. It is not right, you know, to keep a husband from his wife."

"Out of France. Yes. But the poor concert. What a *fiasco!*"

"A *fiasco*, eh? No. We shall do famously. Mendelssohn Jackson says he knows of another tenor, far better."

"Of course, a thousand far better. By-the-way, I suppose it was that boy who came with the story; he is in love with our Beauty's daughter. Now, don't you see, my lord? Wheels within wheels. He knew what he was about, that artless, ingenuous youth."

Even the hint of being taken in is not agreeable. Lord Bindley was put out.

"Then the concert—" she went on; "it is most unfortunate. The country people, the second relay who are coming, will, of course, have the notion that they

were to hear a prodigy—a human dying swan—a Rubini for nothing. Their disappointment will be great. He has a nice voice; but they will magnify him."

His lordship looked irresolute. "It is very annoying and provoking," he said.

Mrs. Labouchere went on.

"He is dying to stay. It is rather absurd the poor creature cannot amuse himself for two or three days, and in this harmless way. It is all very innocent. Bindley will not corrupt him."

Lord Bindley laughed. The other was but a spasmodic emotion; he was sorry afterwards that he had given way to it. The concert, in his mind, had assumed the dimensions of something grand, and even exhibition-like. The cares of dinner then supervened. After that meal had been transacted, he came up to her and said,

"I have a little plan of my own. We shall keep Talbot, and make him sing at the concert."

The lady wondered. Lord Bindley was not accounted a very bright nobleman. This was probably what the Americans would call some "foolish scare," and she dismissed it. The Beauty was very gloomy and depressed all that night, as if ordered for execution. His dream was over, his happy furlough gone for ever. He was oppressed and ill-treated. He was under sentence, as it were. Lord Bindley had always made it a point to be ecclesiastical when he had company, and read prayers on Sunday mellifluously, as though he had been ordained. He took the Beauty aside after these evening offices, and said:

"My dear Talbot, I hope you will stay with us. I make it a point. I tell you

what, I am going up to town to-morrow, and shall take Mrs. Talbot on my way, and arrange the whole with her. I know she will be reasonable, and a few words with her will settle the whole business."

A sparkle came into the Beauty's eye. That was indeed like business. That would compose matters. She could not, as he expected, resist that aristocratic influence. Later, he met Mrs. Labouchere: but she said not a word, looking at him with a sort of amused glance, which made him feel quite uncomfortable. Perhaps he had fallen low in her estimation. When he met her again, he said:

"You have heard how happily everything has been arranged."

"No," she said, indifferently, "I hear so much."

"I mean about Lord Bindley's going to town."

"O, and see your people, and *get you leave*. Well, it sounds strangely."

"Not *that*, you always say that; no, just to speak to them."

There was a look of contempt on her face. "I would rather anything than that. It is too humiliating. But of course it sounds strange, my interfering. Still, I am sorry for the whole thing. If you had been advised by me—even if you felt bound to be so nice about staying a day or two—there was a different plan of going about it, which even my poor wits could have helped you to."

The Beauty looked at her eagerly. "O tell me, tell me!" he said.

"Would you follow it, if I told you?" she said. "No. Besides, really it would

sound strange, supplying you with a plan against your wife, in the face of all law and morals."

"Yes," he said; "but when they turn against me — and so many years as I have——"

"Ah, there it is; so many years you have been good and obedient and docile, and here, at the eleventh hour, or rather, at five minutes to twelve, you wish to throw off the yoke. It is only reasonable they should be astonished. No, no; you have put yourself into Lord Bindley's hands, and we had best leave you there."

CHAPTER VII.

UNEXPECTED VISITORS.

NEVER were people so surprised as Mrs. Talbot and our Livy, when a card was brought in, with his lordship's name upon it. The affectionate creatures first thought that something dreadful had happened to their dear Beauty, and that this ambassador had come to break the news to them. His smiling face reassured them, and he at once opened his business.

"I want you, Mrs. Talbot," he said, "to come to us—you and your daughter. It will give us the greatest pleasure. Your father and I were great friends. I can

promise you music, the like of which, they tell me, cannot be matched by amateurs in the three kingdoms. I assure you the concert has made quite a sensation; and, I am told, a *critique* will be in the *Court Journal*. O, you must come."

The artful peer, it will be seen, said nothing of the motive for this invitation, or of the end to which it was to be the means.

Livy was enchanted at the notion, especially as she was told that "he hoped to have a very nice, off-hand young fellow—son of that Hardman over there, but a very different sort of character."

His lordship was very pressing indeed: Mrs. Talbot listened coldly. She was engaged — she was busy — she could do nothing. "And, indeed, Lord Bindley, I wish you would send me home my

foolish husband. I am not well, and you are demoralising him there. Surely Lord Bindley does not believe he has found a Mario in our poor Beauty, who has never learned a note ?"

"Well—er—I don't know; but they all say so. And a lady there, who is one of the most accomplished musicians of the day—you must have heard of her, a daughter of that Hardman——"

"Daughter of that Hardman!" she repeated, half rising. "Do you mean to tell me that *she* is there ?"

"Yes; Mrs. Labouchere. Very great gifts! But what is the matter ?"

Mrs. Talbot remained, her eyes fixed on the ground, while his lordship expatiated on the charms and attractions of his guest. Mrs. Talbot had not forgotten her old training. A rush of ideas was pouring in

upon her; and she was only thinking what she could do, and, without abruptness change her front. The news overwhelmed her; but no one could see any change in her face.

"It is so tempting," she said; "and it is very hard to resist such inducements. Our poor girl, too, gets so little amusement. I should *like* to go."

She was irresolute. The lord thought this was due to his skilful way of putting the matter, and pressed it warmly. A reluctant consent was wrung from her, on one condition. It must be kept a secret. She had a reason. This was agreed to, and his lordship departed.

When he was gone, Livy was confounded by the wild and tragic look that had come into her mother's face.

"I knew it would come to this. I had

an instinct that that vile woman was at the bottom of it. The poor creature had not wit enough to compass such a thing himself. O Heavens! This is too much!"

"But who, dearest?" said the daughter.

"Who? That woman—that Hardman woman! The mill hand! Born in a mill, as I believe she was! How dare she do it? I knew it; I had a presentiment. This low, mean soul, has treasured up the grudge; and she is determined to spite me in this way. Yes, I see it all. It is nothing new: and you are a child, Livy, and can't understand to what lengths women of this sort will go."

Livy was aghast at this vaticination.

"What *are* we to do?" she said.

"Do!" said her mother. "Why meet, defeat her, crush her, as you will see me do. Though I have left off that for years,

I have not forgotten my old ways. I have met others before her, and twice as spiteful and clever, and left them to rue the day they thought of hurting me!"

That night Livy's sleep was troubled, and for the first time she had a sort of glimpse of what a cold, cruel, terrible place the world was.

On the Tuesday evening there was to be a fresh rehearsal for this wonderful concert, which really, from the treatment it is receiving, seems magnifying into an almost Homeric event. Again the Hall was crowded with obsequious retainers, who, in truth, were growing a little wearied with an entertainment that was above their level, as it might be thought by the performers.

Even the farm labourers — the men about the stables — were required to

attend, in Sunday suit, by special "favour" of his lordship.

"I think," he said, benevolently, "we should not draw the line too close; and I am determined to give those poor fellows about the farmyard a chance of hearing some good music. No, I am none of your feudal tyrants."

Hodge and his friends had a miserable night—thought very poorly of the singing, and had often heard better at the alehouse.

It was about the beginning of the second part that the gate bell was heard to clang afar off, and Lord Bindley seen to hurry out to "meet guests." The singers looked at each other with complacency. Here were fresh witnesses, hurrying to admire. It was all fish to their vain net. The Beauty felt the same

excitement, and, after an interval, was getting ready for his new song, composed specially for the occasion. These poor vocal ostriches, who have their bill firmly in the sand, actually endow the more vulgar with intellect, criticism, and a relish, far above even their own level.

The previous song was finishing—"a poor thing, which should never have been allowed into the programme"—and Mr. Talbot was looking down the crowded room, when he noticed a rustle and confusion at the door. It was the host ushering in the new guests. Could he believe his eyes—his senses? What! Mrs. Talbot, and his daughter Olivia!

They to come, too! And what did it mean? He was bewildered, confounded; and when he went out to get his music,

he met Mrs. Labouchere, with a flushed cheek, stern eye, and lip of scorn.

"The naughty boy would not go home to school, so mamma had to come and fetch him! It is *rather* hard on you."

It *was*, he felt, going too far: and he went out with Mendelssohn Jackson, to sing the new song, composed in honour of the occasion. Down below, among the faces, he saw his wife's—cold, and but half interested; but Livy's was fixed on his with an absorbed interest and adoration. That devoted face attracted the attention of many more besides her father, and interested them, too. He was "put out." He felt it as an intolerable slavery, so degrading, so mean; what must they all think of him? *Even Mrs. Labouchere pitying his subjection!* There was some-

thing ludicrous in it. They were fools, and wicked, and deserved a lesson. Alas! for the new song; under such conditions it was an utter failure. Mendelssohn Jackson "putting him in" largely, adding "ridiculous accompaniments" and flourishes and comments, *sotto voce*, "running wild," "keep yourself in,"—"steady there!" It was quite a *fiasco;* in fact, he "broke down," and Lord Bindley was much annoyed.

"I think," said Mendelssohn Jackson, in the "green room" "we had better go back to the 'Long-drawn Smile.' It's safer, of the two. If you consulted me, I'd take 'My Pretty Jane' or something of that kidney; but this last business—no. Rather too loose and rambling—ground gives under us here and there, you see." Mr. Jackson knew perfectly well the name

of our Beauty's song; but he chose thus to misdescribe it.

The Beauty met his relations with that "put out" manner which he could not disguise before company. "So you are come!" he said, according to the unmeaning formula of people who know not what to say. He really did not know what to say or to think; but a sort of hopelessness and despair of defending himself took possession of him.

"You are not in voice to-night," she said, gaily. "You will sing better at the concert, dear. We have come some distance to hear you."

This seemed to say he was to be allowed to remain.

Great curiosity was among the guests as to these new arrivals. Louisa Mary, Countess of Seaman, knew all about her,

in that wonderful way in which certain women of rank "make up," and make out, about any one connected with their order. It is like a book collector, and the books he has never read. Mrs. Talbot was a veteran in fields in which she herself had fought. The Ladies Mariner came about Livy with very much the cold approaches of fishes.

The meeting of the two ladies conveyed nothing to any one present. Do what she would, Mrs. Labouchere found that it would take the shape of her being brought to Mrs. Talbot. The latter had become her old self again; one of the stately band, with a commanding and assured manner there was no resisting. The host at once gave her this place; at once she seemed to combine with the other great dames in a sort of "House of Ladies" in

the place. Her manner was haughty, and even genteelly scoffing, and Mrs. Labouchere fancied she heard the words of depreciation.

"Neighbours, you know," and the tone seemed to convey that that local relation obliged a certain sort of acquaintance.

"You are going to stay in this country, I suppose?" she said; "or were you stopping in France? I forget. I did hear something."

"My brother knows everything about me. I believe he has been with you every day during this last week." This was a thrust back.

"All the officers make their way to our house," said Mrs. Talbot, to "Louisa Mary," as if explaining. "Mr. Talbot likes to see them. By the way, I hear

they have been pressing him to sing—exhibit himself before the whole country. Why, it's not fair to him; he has only a small drawing-room voice."

Lord Bindley grew uneasy. He was always impressed by the last speaker, or last comer.

"He did very well, though; very fairly, so they said."

"O! a rustic audience is not *difficile*."

"It is curious," said Mrs. Labouchere, smiling; "that those who heard the concert should have been pleased: while those who were absent, and heard nothing, condemn the performance. Poor Mr. Talbot! It is very hard on him."

She looked round with a smile, for support. But her faithful backers, "the men," were not there; the cold, haughty stare of the great ladies, understanding

nothing, wondering coldly, shut off sympathy. The expression was reflected on to Lord Bindley's face who looked only half pleased. "Louisa Mary" then says calmly, as if wishing to change the subject, "Have you heard of the Longs of Eaton, lately?" It will not do; no boldness, courage, wit, sarcasm, can ever fight against such combination. Most curious, too, was the attitude taken by Mrs. Talbot, the calm air of superiority and contempt, so that Lord Bindley at once invested her with the ensign of musical criticism, and began to say, "You think so? Now, tell me, do you think we are right in that?"

It was impossible, too, not to notice the change in the Beauty since this unlucky arrival—as one of the men said, "It was as though he had had his ears

cropped." He seemed to have lost his independent way, and appeared to slink about in a very abject manner, indeed. It had all the look as if he had been fetched away, and having presumed on the indulgence allowed him, was now to be punished. His wife still pursued her fashion of being amused at the Beauty's coming before the public. "So it is to be that new composition. Better keep to your old friend, the 'Lingering Smile.'"

"Yes, yes," said one of the gentlemen, "as he has lingered so long, he may as well finish with it."

"Ha, ha!" the host said, innocently. "Very good; but I think it wasn't fair of Mrs. Talbot to come for you in this way. Eh, Mrs. Labouchere?"

"It certainly has an odd look," that

lady answered. "But, Mr. Talbot is, of course, the proper judge of that."

"O, we are not going to turn Lord Bindley's little joke into a serious matter: but that new song, or composition, will not do. If you *must* be a public singer, dear, let us have what you know something about. I could not bear to see you break down, dear."

"There is no talk of breaking down," he said, pettishly. "You weren't here; you didn't hear me, and how well it went off. There is no use making a fuss about the thing. They say it's the best thing I have ever done."

"They say! What, the press — the critics? Who, dear?"

"Nonsense; you know what I mean. Here's Mrs. Labouchere thinks so, and she's an excellent judge."

"You will have to submit to the real judge, dear—the public. Seriously, you must not think of it, even if you get a testimonial in writing as to its merits."

"No, no, Talbot," said his lordship, firmly; "we can run no risks. We shall have the lingering—what-do-ye call it?—in the bills."

Mrs. Talbot looked with calm triumph at her enemy.

"Come, Mr. Talbot," said the latter; "come, at all events, and practise. I am ready for my duty, and believe in the new song."

She went out, and the Beauty followed her with alacrity.

"This is very sad," she said to him, as they went along the corridor; "and seems to be a sort of change. I am very

sorry for it, and that our pleasant little relations are to be at an end."

"O, no! I hope not. It *is* very hard. Everything was going on so nicely."

"O, yes," she said; "it won't do now. Somehow it seems we have all lost the old spirit; there is a sort of restraint come on us."

"O, it is such nonsense and folly. Everything turned into a fuss, and to be made ridiculous, too, in this way. You heard Lord Bindley—'fetched away,' indeed!"

"Yes, I felt for you. It is foolish, magnifying things into undue importance. A little song, too! I am sure it has lessened all your confidence, and that you will fail before the audience, as you did the other night."

"Exactly—exactly what I feel. It has

taken away the pleasant spirit I had. I declare, I am quite put out."

"Yes, I felt for you," she repeated, slowly. "And you know — that is, I would wish you to think—that I am your friend, and take an interest in you. I did not know you before this visit. I own I mistook you. I now see that you have real gifts, real talent; and I think it is a pity that you should not use them for the amusement of your friends."

The Beauty coloured; it was long since he had been spoken to in words of such genuine compliment.

"O, I am so glad you think that, and I feel your kindness so much."

"Not at all—and for that reason I should feel for you if you were humiliated before people. It is unnecessary. Where is the use of it?" she went on, warmly.

"My husband, Colonel Labouchere, was the most generous and upright of men—though I felt that I had more cleverness, as it was called, and could have commanded him, still I had such a pride and respect for him, that I could only think of making him respected by every one else. I could not think that levelling him, or making him cheap before people, was raising myself. The more I looked up to him, and made others look up to him, the more I was adding to my own *prestige*. This is the sensible view, and the only affectionate view."

He was about to answer, when they heard a voice at the door.

CHAPTER VIII.

A SKIRMISH.

"O, THERE you are, Beauty dear! I want to speak to you."

Mrs. Labouchere looked round from the piano, and laughed. "That is a female name. I declare I was near answering to it."

"It is absurd!" he said, angrily; "calling a man such ridiculous names. What is it, now? I am practising."

"Never mind; I have something more important than the singing. Come, dear, don't keep me, please."

The Beauty could not resist, and moved towards the door.

"Charming, charming!" said Mrs. Labouchere; "*there* is docility, *there* is obedience! You should publish your receipt, Mrs. Talbot."

The Beauty stopped, irresolute and pettish. "Obedience, indeed! it is ridiculous. See what is thought of it by other people—really making me so ridiculous. Just let me finish, and do go away."

Mrs. Talbot came forward steadily, put her arm in his, secured him, and looking up into his face with a most coquettish air, said,

"O, you will come with me, I know, dear. Really, something important—letters to show you. Come!"

This bait attracted him, and he went with her.

"I shall be back in a moment, Mrs. Labouchere," he said.

Along the corridor Mrs. Talbot said not a word. Once in her own room, she closed the door sharply, left him standing, and drawing back to the window; gazed at him with a steady look of scorn, that made him quail.

"*So this* is what you are about!" she said, with contempt. "O, you child! Once away from your mamma and nurses, these are the follies you go after!"

"No follies," he said, heatedly. "Just what other men do. It's getting too bad; I'm not a child, and won't be. Nurses, indeed!"

"There, dear. What sensible man ever had to protest that he was not a child? But I see I have just come in time to

save you from more follies. Your poor head is turned, I believe, with this little song of yours. Do behave properly. Think of any married man that you know. *They* consider they have retired. What do they care for a little foolish applause? Why, one would think from your writing, you had made a successful speech in parliament."—Alas, Mrs. Talbot!—"But I would advise you to reflect whether you will not make some failure very mortifying to us all. You know, Lord Bindley would never forgive us, to say nothing of the criticism, and the ridicule."

The Beauty glowed and fumed. "Yes, and whose fault is it? I sang beautifully the other night, and every one was delighted, and enchanted, until you came after me—to fetch me to school—as they say—"

"Who say?"

"They all say it; I might as well be a little child. How *can* I sing?—it has made me all nervous and uncertain, and you know the least thing that way affects it. And I can see that you have been going on to Lord Bindley, too, for his manner is quite changed to me. And I tell you what," said the Beauty, with the tone and manner of a child that was smashing its toys to spite its parents, "I'll just throw the whole thing up. There! I will."

"That would be foolish, dear; but anything is better than a *fiasco*—"

"O, it is very fine talking," went on the Beauty, glowing with excitement; "it is very well. I am putting up with too much, and they all say it's becoming ridiculous, and it musn't go on."

"Musn't go on! Well, sing with all my heart, and we shall see."

"Yes, I know you would like to see. I'm not quite a Russian what-d'ye-call it, under your thumb, as Mrs. Labouchere said."

"O, she said that, did she? I am sure, dear, it was a wonderful sentiment."

"No, I know you don't like her," he went on, spitefully longing to revenge himself somehow. "There are reasons for that—she's a clever woman. She knows another reason for your coming here, though one would think you had enough of meddling with her."

The fine lady's Chalon cheek coloured. She felt that she must strike with vigour, and she knew his nature well enough. It was like going to a cupboard for a birch.

"Don't speak to me in that way," she said, looking at him steadily, "and above all, don't forget your invariably gentlemanly manners. You are whining like a child. You, a married man with a grown-up daughter, and your head overset on account of your little song! Why, if you had been in parliament and made a brilliant speech, like Mr. Horner, or carried a case at the bar—but instead, you have sung a little ballad before a few villagers! And this emboldens you to insult me. Stay on here as long as you please—sing until you tire them out. I shall certainly wait, as I intended, to hear the result."

"I shan't sing a note of it. You've settled that. Not a note, if I was to die for it! If I did, you would make me break down."

"Do just as you like, dear. I only

think of yourself; I can see even the men here are amused, and have their joke about the new tenor."

Foolish woman! The weak mind of the Beauty treasured up all these words; they scared his very heart. He knew there was truth in them; but he could not forget the mortification. A hundred little womanish projects of revenge entered his brain—a longing to mortify *her* in some way. The other hints of Mrs. Labouchere seemed now to gain confirmation. This was mere "treatment of him as a child." Long after, when certain events had taken place, which added many a line to the delicate Chalon face—lines that defied all the smooth trowellings of art—when she was thinking herself the most wretched creature on the face of the earth, she ought to have turned her eyes backward

to this day, and to that poor and unfruitful triumph over him.

He left the room. Then her face fell. "I must get him away from this at once. He quoted some of that low woman's speeches. The mean artful creature she is, she has not forgotten the way in which I set her down. No wonder; for I do hate her; and, if I could send him away, would like nothing more than to stay on here, and trample on her every day and every hour."

She could do that, however. Mr. Hardman was still there, but going away on the morrow, having at last found the unwelcome truth forced upon him that he was not to be of *that* company. Yet he thought he saw a glimpse of sunshine. The great ladies were talking eagerly together at lunch over a plan they were

planning. "Louisa Mary," the Countess, meagre and stingy for all her rank, was engaged in some bazaar—their share of which was to be carried out on the most thrifty principles, involving, also, predatory calls upon their neighbours.

It was to be down at Seaman—a charity for a certain orphanage, into which a deal of worsted and anti-macassars entered, the Ladies Mariner doing a vast deal of captaincy over the unhappy little orphans before visitors, making them redound to their own honour and glory. The countess introduced this subject as a sort of great public duty, and made a kind of charity sermon, dwelling on the meritoriousness of the good object. It was duly enlarged on, as if it was some political measure; and the august lady described her hopes and chances.

Mrs. Talbot seemed to have entered into it already with spirit, and was engaged for contributions, co-operation, &c. The other guests listened, awed, as these plans were shadowed forth; and Lord Robert volunteered to be auctioneer at the close of the performance, and knock down all the lots to the highest bidder of the young ladies.

Mr. Hardman had been listening restlessly, his cold, hard face lighting up with eager look. At last he cleared his throat—

"I think, my lady," he said, after lunch was over, "we should all be glad to give some help to such good work. There's my daughter, Mrs. Labouchere, had these sort of things out at Malta."

Lady Seaman, who had "scarcely spoken three words to the man" since she

was in the house, was turning on him with a scarcely polite stare, when Mrs. Talbot, his "old friend," interposed.

"How do you mean, Mr. Hardman?" Mrs. Labouchere was watching warily, and was at hand.

"He means the general principle of charity, which nobody can dispute. You remember, papa, the picture you offered to Mrs. Talbot?"

"I mean," said her father, in a loud voice, "that her ladyship might be very glad to have a person like Mrs. Labouchere, who understands these matters, to help her. We could guarantee as handsome a table as could be seen in the place; and, as far as a large subscription goes, a cheque on my bankers——"

"It is very good of Mr. Hardman to offer Mrs. Labouchere's services," said

Mrs. Talbot, with an exquisite expression of malice; "but I fear Lady Seaman seems to have made her arrangements."

"My father mistakes," said Mrs. Labouchere, warmly; "I would not hold a table for anything. Pray understand, it is not I who wish it."

"We are obliged to keep it to our own set," said Lady Seaman, haughtily. "We have had offers of money, and that sort of thing, if we chose to take them; but it could not be done."

"Hardly, I think," said Mrs. Talbot. This was very sweet revenge. Though the great ladies thought a little wistfully of Mr. Hardman's guineas thus lost to them.

"Of course the bazaar is for all-comers, and any one with charitable intentions can walk in, and lay out what they please, and

thus help a most deserving charity. But the organization must be kept to one set."

The almost insolence of this speech, which was spoken to Mrs. Labouchere, whose cheek became pale, Mr. Hardman felt indistinctly. There was something like a hint administered to him. But he went on in his floundering way.

"I am sure, Lady Seaman, I should be delighted to give my mite to such a good institution, as Mrs. Talbot says, and if a cheque on my bankers——"

"Papa!" broke in Mrs. Labouchere, in a deep tone of scorn. "For Heaven's sake do not be offering this assistance where you see it is not desired. Surely, it is said, as plain as words can say it, that your aid is not wanted. Mine need not have been declined, as it was never offered."

"O, I'm sure not," said Lady Seaman. "You would see how difficult it must be. All sorts of people have been asking us, and we are obliged to refuse."

"I repeat, Lady Seaman, you may have refused me, but I never sought the honour of assisting in your bazaar."

"But *I* did," said her father, pompously drawing himself up to resent this repudiation; "for you. I like to see these sort of things supported. And if Lady Seaman had allowed you——"

"This is intolerable," said his daughter, half turning round to leave the room. "Do—do leave the matter as it is."

It was exquisite for the other ladies to see the victim writhing in this fashion on the hook. Mrs. Talbot smiled over at her august acquaintance. She seemed, to herself, to have obtained a handsome

indemnity for all she had suffered at the hands of her enemy. Yet she was only laying up accumulated injuries, for she must surely pay a heavy reckoning. These little vindictive punishments were but shortlived pitiful triumphs. What *they* would be met by, would be far more deadly and lasting. Even as she smiled, came a significant check, for at that moment the Beauty entering, Mrs. Labouchere said suddenly:—

"But here would be a useful friend. Mr. Talbot would go about the rooms bringing recruits, helping the young ladies to sell; or, best of all, he would sing for the charity."

"A charming idea; would you help us, Mr. Talbot? They often get up music at these things."

"Or he might be an auctioneer, and sell

off the articles. Mr. Talbot is such a public man now——"

The Beauty was still in "the sulks," and much aggrieved. He had a little of the French malice about him, and saw very plainly there was an opportunity here for mischief, and with much cordiality said he would be delighted. "When was their bazaar?"

"Next month."

Mrs. Labouchere cried, "O he could manage to go then." They were so sorry they could not offer him a room.

"But that was no matter," he said. "There was Bagshaw close by, who would put him up."

"You see, there is quite a run on you, Mr. Talbot," Mrs. Labouchere went on; "every one wishes to make an engagement with you. By-and-by the demands will

come from London and all parts of the provinces. Ah! in London *you would be appreciated!*"

The Beauty almost blushed. This was all very sweet. "I should like to contribute my humble quota, if it amuses: but whatever honour comes, I owe to you, Mrs. Labouchere."

Again Mrs. Talbot felt that some moves in the little game had gone against her, though it was only a pawn or two. She had not yet put out her strength; though with a sort of nervousness she felt that the time might soon come when she must fight with every weapon. Every hour she was seeing that this woman was not to be despised, and might have a depth of power in reserve, which she dared not think of. This, after all, was but the stinging of the gad-fly, and would be but for a short time,

as Mr. Hardman had announced she was to live for the future in Paris, "and she hated England."

During the rest of their visit the Beauty —still under a sense of wrong—indulged himself in many petty acts of indemnity, all which Mrs. Talbot bore with a smiling calm, as she would the pettishness of a boy. On the night before, he had been out late in the garden, and came in with something like a beginning of a cold, and she said, "You should have taken care, dear, if you *do* mean to sing——"

"Yes, I knew I'd be unfortunate, and have something to interfere. Everything spoiled; and here am I worried and bothered, and we were all going on so nicely——"

"Until I came? But *I* did not give you the cold, did I? I would do some-

thing for it—a mustard plaster, or, your feet in water——"

"Yes, as if I was a child,"—it was wonderful how that little bit of iron had entered into his soul! "to be put to bed with gruel and flannels, and have them all laughing at me."

"Well, you must do one thing or the other, dear. Sing or not sing. Livy and I are dying with curiosity, after the rapturous accounts you wrote us. Though I hear that envious music-master, Jackson, or whatever his name is, is not so cordial in his applause, and says you should get lessons before coming out before the public."

Foolish Mrs. Talbot! again must the chorus of this drama call out. Every one of these little pin thrusts will be registered against you by that childish mind, and

possibly be revenged. He was speechless, and turned away, then went to seek his friend and counsellor.

The night came round, the concert hall was crowded again. The rustics this time had to be "driven," much as his lordship's Irish tenants were, at an election. The old programme was gone through; the sisters warbled and thrilled their "Cam hame wi' the Kye," which they nodded and wagged and spoke, and even danced—everything but sang. The elder had a red plaid scarf, crosswise; the younger a green one, to add to the dramatic effect, and both had one arm a-kimbo, like *real* Scotch lassies, defiant, coquettish, enticing; in fact so carried away by the enthusiasm, that had the Theatre Royal Drury been "convenient" and the manager suggested stepping on those boards for a repetition

of the performance, they would have gone on without hesitation. It must be said this was the performance that most delighted the rustics, who were charmed with its *abandon*. Mr. Jackson, however, wore a smile of good-humoured contempt, as he strummed the few *ex officio* chords, as he called them.

"Hardly singing," he said, later. "That 'Scotch thirds' business was the regular thing for sisters. Papa likes it after dinner. Costa," he added, as if a bosom intimate of that eminent conductor, "would give a hundred pounds to hear that." A donation which might be accepted as a compliment, or the reverse.

They were looking forward with some interest to the re-appearance of the Beauty; for, to say the truth, his Adonis-like air, his sweet and conscious modesty,

which was mere pride, lent a sort of piquancy and amusement. The gentlemen visitors looked at each other with a quiet enjoyment as he passed by in all his *primo tenore* glory. For he had battled with the cold, and was burning, not so much to delight the crowd as to put down those two ladies who were waiting to hear him, and who really seemed to him like enemies, or persons to whom he had a spite. He, most unreasonably, laid to this account a fresh mortification that he had received, namely, an abrupt summons from that new-born eminent connoisseur, Lord Bindley.

"Come, Talbot, I want to hear these two songs of yours together. We can't run any risks, you know. I have my doubts about the new one—at least, Jackson doesn't seem to think it safe."

Thus put on his trial, he had to give them in a rather uncertain and faltering way. Mr. Mendelssohn Jackson did not certainly aid in his department of the venture, —spelling it out with a curious air, as if it were some Japanese system of notation.

"Seems strained and irregular. Ah! we must keep to the A, B, C in these things. You should go to a grinder, and pick up a little harmony. I don't know; we seem getting into the jungle here."

Much alarmed at these forebodings, Lord Bindley said decisively,—

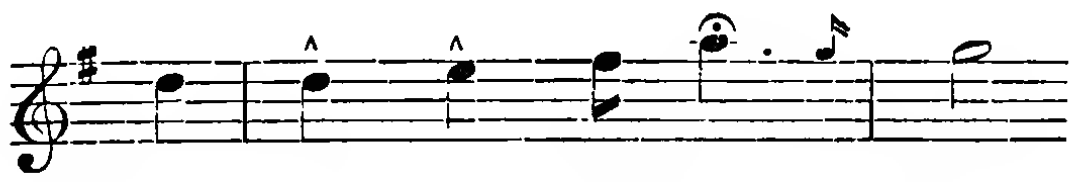
"I beg, Talbot, you will run no risk; and I must request you will sing your first song."

He was out now before the audience. He saw the faces ranged below, and saw his wife's close to him. How he would confound her suspicions and doubts. Yes,

Mrs. Labouchere was right. It was only at home that a man was never appreciated. He had a note in reserve at the end of each verse—a "high A"—which he had kept in ambush, which he would bring out at the close, make the welkin ring—that is, the beams in the ceiling,—and cause them all to look at each other with wonder and amazement. Not even Mendelssohn Jackson knew of it. From that envious practitioner should be wrung unextorted praise. Only to Mrs. Labouchere, just as he went on, had he confided what he had in store. *That* he could not resist. "They will see what is in me!" he said, triumphantly.

He went through his first lines rather doubtfully, for he felt nervous, and, with all his preparation, rather hoarse. But energy and purpose have done greater

wonders. He was warming to the work; he was at the last line; he was entering on the "last and lingering smile." He was lifting himself slowly, gathering himself for the effort—



When, alas! just as with a desperate effort he hoisted himself up on that fatal A, it gave way under him like some frail lath—it snapped; in short, a strange unearthly sound, something "like the crow of a cock," as one of his enemies remarked, filled the hall. Worse still, a sort of titter fluttered over the seats; every one looked at each other and smiled; the gentlemen, standing together, laughed. The Beauty had broken down! How he got through the next verse he knew not. He heard

Mendelssohn Jackson ostentatiously advising him—pointing to the notes with one hand, while he played with the other—"Stick to your text; I'll play it with you." And the "wretch" noisily pounded out the air during the whole of the next verse, looking up in his face, to show that he was guiding and keeping him from going astray. The voice of the Beauty grew fainter and fainter. He would have given the world to have fled away, and hid his head in the earth. At the end Mendelssohn Jackson crashed down some hasty chords and closed the unhappy performance. The Beauty retired hurriedly to scarcely a hand—a good-natured few applauding—Lord Bindley saying, almost angrily, "Really, he ought to have known. Spoiled my whole concert." A coarse, funny man even called out from the back,

"Encore!"—then dipped his head down to escape observation. This produced a laugh: a crowd will laugh at anything.

The jests of the men became unendurable, so coarse and rude. "Gye won't engage you now, when he hears this: give him ever so many lingering smiles, ha! ha!" Another said, "I'd have been content with my crown of laurel; I would, indeed!" While some one said, before Mrs. Talbot, and the circle, "Mrs. Talbot's advice was wise enough, and I would have taken it. I heard her say, that you ought to be content with your glory."

"He will be wiser another time," she said, smiling.

Mrs. Labouchere was at hand; they were just going up to bed. "That would be an unsafe rule," she said. "We never hear of a successful amateur contented

with one performance. No, he tries again. The world would, otherwise, stand still. There would be no success. There is my moral, my advice."

Some of the more sharp-witted had begun to perceive this sort of hostility between the ladies, and were watching with interest. Mrs. Talbot's eyes began to glitter. "Good advice, I fear, is quite thrown away on him."

"Not mine, I know. Mr. Talbot has consulted me so much lately. Now, what I say is—and I am sure I shall be supported—Mr. Talbot has made a great success. He was nervous to-night, and there was a reason for that. You should go on and not be discouraged. Go to London, put yourself under some famous master who will bring out your voice. Go about to parties, and see the world, and

do not be buried in that dismal quarter of the country, where both our houses are. Life is very sweet, and, alas, as short as it is sweet. There is the good woman's charm, and I make him a present of it."

It had effect on the crowd, who went with her, and applauded. The Beauty, more rebellious than ever, vows it to be most sensible; his wife can only act scorn and indifference. She longed for her wretched visit to be at an end, and the more wretched woman to be expatriated to France. Only a few hours more, and she would be away, out of it.

It seemed, certainly, as though she had been worsted in this little series of encounters. She dared not own it to herself; but she had. *The Beauty knew it, too,* as she saw in his malevolent eye; but she said not a word. Alas! as with the in-

genious monkey who goes round in the circus, if the training be suspended but for a day, it is all blank, and has to be recommenced; so she saw that much hard toil was in store for her, and for her alone.

The morning came. The guests gather to see guests go away. The carriage was at the door, and trunks were coming down. Mr. and Mrs. and Miss Talbot were going away.

"So much obliged to you, Talbot," says the host; "mind we see you here again soon."

The ladies were shaking hands, and Mrs. Talbot and her enemy went through the same ceremony. Mr. Hardman stood by. "We shall soon meet again, ma'am. We are neighbours, and as my daughter and Talbot seem such firm allies in the

singing way, I mean to get up a great deal of music——"

A restless trouble and curiosity made her hazard the answer, "O, when she comes back from France?"

"O, we have changed all that," said Mrs. Labouchere, with a smile. "I am going to be filial, *and always to live with my father at the Towers. Bon voyage!*"

CHAPTER IX.

LADY SHIPLEY.

During the absence of Mr. Hardman from the Towers, a new family had arrived in the district. A rather decayed road-side villa had been taken by them, which had been long unlet, and it was presently known that a no less distinguished person than Lady Shipley and her daughter were living there. Lady Shipley was the Dowager Lady Shipley, her daughter was Miss Honoria; to speak the whole truth about them in a single sentence, they were neither more nor less than a pair of marauders, who, like Mr.

Carlyle's parson, had scoured the country seeking for "horse meat and man meat;" in short, had settled down in fat and flourishing districts, which they had pillaged socially far and near, left waste, and then moved on to another. They were genteel, poor, and clever, a combination of attributes which almost amounted to wealth, or, at least, to comfort. Her son, the present Sir Thomas, was married, and not particularly fond of his mother or sister, who had about four hundred a year to live on, eked out by the contributions, *in kind*, of their friends and neighbours. Lady Shipley, it was known, would accept articles of dress and clothing for her Honoria, in a pleasant, sensible way that took the thing quite out of the character of anything eleemosynary.

"Here, Mony," so she called her

daughter, "don't be a fool; you won't get a dress like that to suit you, if you were to go round all the shops." Or:

"My dear Mrs. ——, Mony is very much obliged to you, and has no foolish stuck-up notions about her, I can assure you. She is too well born and well connected to run any chance of being misunderstood, and it will help to keep down her pride a little."

The same lady would invite herself to dinner—to your "little bit of mutton," which was just what she liked, she said, and in this fashion had a most comfortable and enjoyable life. She kept a wary eye out for the sort of persons whom she knew would serve her purpose; and when people were inveighing against rich and vulgar people, her elderly ears quivered like a dog's

when he hears his master approaching.

It was thus when the term of her cheap mansion was expiring that she heard Mr. Hardman described, with his style of manner and of living; and it occurred to her that he was just the sort of person to be near, and to know, *i.e.*, to prey on. "These people, Mony, dear," she said to her daughter, "will be worth a hundred a year to us." She had mapped it all out: a fortnight's visiting every two months, a dinner at least every fortnight, with other perquisites; and a pleasant gentleman giving an agreeable description of the "duke's coachman," and the way that menial was introduced on all occasions, the lady, instead of joining in the laughter, resolved that she should be driven many a time by a person of such august antecedents.

The old villa was procured, "a dead bargain," and some old furniture, which went about with her, was transferred to it.

Mr. Hardman had taken her precisely as she had hoped; had searched his heraldic red and blue books, and had noted with surprise and delight where her exceeding strength lay; was confounded at the noble connections, cousinships, &c., which spread out from her in all directions like the rays of a star-fish. She was exactly what he wished; and he had an instinct that she would graciously lend herself to his humour in a very different fashion from those "stuck-up" Talbots.

The great coach and its still greater coachman had already taken him there, from the windows of which cards had duly

been handed to a mouldy old man-servant, whom Mr. Hardman regarded with exceeding reverence as an aristocratic retainer. The visit had been returned. Lady Shipley had gone in; had sat a long time, and had delighted him by her easy manners, her wish to please, and to be pleased by him. "You have everything charming about you, Mr. Hardman; such taste, such magnificence! I warn you, you will have me coming here very often. It reminds me of The Rams—my cousin Ramsgate's place."

"I know; Lord Ramsgate. Indeed! 'Pon my word! Then, I hope you *will* come very often, Lady Shipley. I hope to see you whenever you find it convenient to yourself."

"And the pictures, and your flowers! I doat on both; I could live and die

among pictures and flowers. Mony, dear, you know that—"

"You like flowers? Here! I say! Send for the gardener, and let him follow us. I have got the finest gardener in the whole shire. Lord Loveland tried to get him from me; but his lordship could not conveniently manage the wages the man asked, and is well worth. Now, Lady Shipley, I request you will point out what you like, and it shall be cut and sent over to you. Fruit—care for fruit, Lady Shipley?"

"Ah! why you know all my tastes! I could live and die in a hothouse, my dear Mr. Hardman."

The marauder, in fact, could live and die anywhere where there were any of the good things of life. She had the odd gift of announcing as her special taste, a liking

for wines, fruits, meats, or everything of the best. Her heavily-built, dowdy person was, indeed, excellent evidence of this fancy. Before she left the garden it was arranged that a great basket, containing flowers and fruits, should be sent over. A dinner, also, had been sketched out. This was not a bad morning's work. But she had not done yet.

"I have heard of Mrs. Labouchere," she said, "and am dying to know her. But you have some one else—a son?"

"Yes, yes," said Mr. Hardman, loftily, as if owning to a luxury which every gentleman ought to possess. "Oh certainly!"

"Oh, where is young Mr. Hardman?" went on Lady Shipley. "I should so like to know him."

Young Mr. Hardman was sent for and produced; and Lady Shipley, after some

expressions of implied gratification at the exhibition of such a treasure, adroitly "shunted" herself on to a siding with Mr. Hardman, leaving the two young carriages coupled behind. The well-trained Honoria lost not a moment, and in a very short time had forced a sort of intimacy, founded on volunteered confidences of her own life, feelings, &c., and of questions as to *his*.

In this artful way there can be established a perfect intimacy and friendship which, though all on one side, seems as good to spectators as any other. The young man, who had reasons for keeping his father in good humour, did his best to make himself agreeable. Then they went away.

His father had been at home some three days, and every morning the son had

intended walking straight into the study, to speak with him on a very important matter. The young man, since his father's return, had been very nervous indeed with the news which he had to break; and after the ladies had gone, seeing that Mr. Hardman was in excellent humour and even spirits, thought it a good opportunity. He knocked at the study door.

"Come in," said his father. "Well! What do you want?"

"Perhaps, sir, you are engaged? If so, I can come another time."

The father looked at him with a dark mistrust.

"This is some damned concealed tailor's bill, sir, or something of the sort. You always come skulking in this way when you have *that* on hand."

"No, no, sir! indeed, nothing of the kind."

Yet it *was* something of the kind, inasmuch as the communication was attended with similar nervousness.

"Then, what is it, sir?"

"What I wished to say, sir, is this: I have always tried to be a good son—at least, to do my best to please you. You, sir, have been a kind father—on the whole —that is, when I deserved it."

"Rubbish, sir! What are you coming to, with all this palaver? You're driving at something disagreeable; and I tell you what, I'll make it disagreeable to you. What is it? Don't waste my time."

Desperate, the young fellow brought it —blurted it—out. His father was not in a rage; but took it quite coolly.

"Well! and what is this to me? Are

you not in a free country? Don't you know I can't force you to do anything? But I can do *this*, my lad—let you be a beggar, which I will, as sure as the stocks rise and fall in the market. Ah! don't talk folly; don't come to me with such trash. Are you a baby or a schoolboy?"

The young man protested, very earnestly, that he was serious. He was pledged—engaged—and must go on. He was bound by honour and duty and affection.

"I won't have it," said Mr. Hardman. "You are a low whining cur. Do you think I made all my money, that bought you that rag of a red coat, and raised you out of the puddle, all for this? I won't have it. I don't choose to have *my* name connected with those infernal, stuck-up, stiff-backed people. Ah! I'll give 'em a

lesson yet, and show them my money is as good as their pride any day. Don't *bother* me, sir," he said, vehemently, "any more! I won't put up with it! I'm ashamed of you, you sneak! with your love and your whine. You raise your family! Raise money is all you'll do, you selfish cur, you!—that won't do a hand's turn to raise me, on whom you fatten. You're no good, and as helpless as any country oaf. Another smart lad, with your advantage and my banker's book at your back, would have pushed forward and made a splendid marriage. Don't talk to me any more about such stuff! I don't see it, and won't see it. There!"

Mrs. Labouchere was to arrive the following morning from town; and the young man—though brother and sister,

they were not too affectionate—thought his best course would be to wait until she came. He had noted that since the marriage she had a sort of influence over her father, the truth being that the mean nature of Mr. Hardman grovelled a little before her in her new position and good connection. She came, and her brother told her all. She started with a scornful and bitter look.

"Yes," he said, hastily; "I knew you did not like them, and was afraid you could not endure them——"

"You quite mistake," she said, coldly. "It is quite a wrong interpretation. I can be just in such an important matter as that. But have you considered what you are about to do? Enter into a family that despise — look down on — you, the manufacturer's son—that have in-

sulted your father, and whose treatment of *me*—but that, of course, I put aside."

"But what *am* I to do? I am pledged to her."

"In that case, you must go on, I suppose. I shall do what you wish to help you. What must it be—speak to him?"

"Oh, if you would!"

"If I do, then, this must be understood —I do no more. I am not called on to favour it in any way. I will not make any approach to them, as it would be hypocritical; and if my manner or ways even hinder it, as I know it will, you must not blame me. But, as far as our father is concerned——"

"It is most kind and generous," said the young man, eagerly; "and I can ask no more."

That night Mrs. Labouchere went to her father's study, and remained there nearly an hour. He received her full of bluster and indignation.

"Such work ! That fool's last notion ; but I won't have it. He shall marry as I wish, or go and carry his coat through the streets. I shan't have it."

"It is hard," said his daughter ; "and certainly, as money seems to be the grand thing now-a-days, he ought to get a good match and raise the family. But these Talbots, father, are they not well connected ?"

"A stuck-up, infernal lot ; it's just some trick of theirs. But why should *you* mention them ? I'm sure they made you swallow dirt enough."

"The greater my magnanimity ! But I believe you have got at the secret ; it must

be some trick. Like that trap of the picture into which she led you."

Mr. Hardman coloured at this recollection, which was really like some rankling sore.

"They shan't trick me. No; not one of them, if it was to cost me a thousand pound! No; I'll pay 'em for that, yet. Never! I'll bring their noses to the grindstone!"

"Then, if you will let me advise you, father, you will not oppose it."

"Not oppose it! Do you take me for a fool?"

"Not oppose it *now*. It will be done, in spite of you. If I was to manage it, I could find a way of paying off that woman, as you call it, in a more satisfactory way."

"Oh, some scheming. I don't want it. What do you mean?"

"Let the thing go on. The girl's in love with him; they must humour *her*. They are ready to agree. Revenge, and that sort of thing, is low, and not worth the trouble; but you are not bound to be considerate in any way to those who insult us as they have done. The true dignity would be to let the *whole come from them*. You will see how the matter will go on, and you can interfere at any time."

He looked at her steadily.

"I don't understand this finessing. My way has always been straightforward. I don't choose the business, and I won't have it."

"He might do far better. Even that girl that was here to-day—people of wonderful connection, and seeming even far more like *real* ladies. But you, father,

know the world better, and have seen more of it than I have; so I only speak with diffidence."

This bit of deference only made Mr. Hardman more pompous; but it had the effect intended.

"I shall consider all these things, never fear. I don't usually make mistakes. This house and furniture, and the grounds round it, and what I have in the funds and securities, are not mistakes. I can get on very well without advice. There! we may leave the matter so until morning."

But the prospect she had opened would never have occurred to his thick brain; and he did see now that there was a field before him. That slight of the picture returned in so humiliating a fashion, was always before him. Even the man who

had gone off with some of his money long ago had not hurt him so much. The hint he had got he knew how to better in his own clumsy way.

CHAPTER X.

A CLOUD IN THE HORIZON.

MEANWHILE the Beauty and his family were once more at home, the former in very high dudgeon—a sort of settled *sulk*, in which he found great profit. There was a sensible relief for the two ladies to have him at home again, safe and secure, removed to that pleasant retirement out of the dangerous allurements of a disturbing world. He might "vent" himself in any way; he met nothing but indulgence and allowance. He had been recaptured and brought back. On this ground they thought it better to say nothing "till to-

morrow," about the proposal made to his daughter, from which, now, Mrs. Talbot began to shrink as from a degradation; yet she was generous and unselfish enough to think only of her daughter, who must not suffer, and whose affections she saw were seriously engaged. That was the most unselfish sacrifice she had ever made in her long career.

For a species of sword of Damocles had been hanging over her head ever since she returned; and the news she had heard, as she left Lord Bindley's, that the unscrupulous woman was to be near her—for what end she could well guess—had seemed some terrible blow. As yet she believed that she had not returned home.

About evening young Hardman himself came riding up, and hurried in.

"I have told my father," he said, in a rather agitated way; "and he was very angry at first, principally, I believe, because I had not consulted him. But now he is much more moderate, and says I must not be in a hurry in these matters, and must consult his convenience." And then he added—"But you know what my poor father would say, as to great people condescending to *him*, which of course is all imagination. Of course we never anticipated it would run smooth; but Livy will not visit it on me?"

Livy's eyes visited on him the most boundless sympathy and affection instead.

Mrs. Talbot saw this, and sighed.

"You have told Mr. Talbot this plan? I did not the other day. I merely hinted—"

"No."

"Shall he be told now? There he is."

Mrs. Talbot thought it would be better to delay this communication till they were alone.

The Beauty entered, dull and aggrieved; but his face cleared and brightened when he saw the young man.

"How are you, Hardman? How are they at The Towers? *All home again?*"

"Thank you," said the young man, "quite well. My sister came back only last night. By the way, here is a note I was to give you."

He took it out and put it into the Beauty's hand, who withdrew into the next room to read it. Mrs. Talbot almost writhed.

"A note from my sister," the youth said, in explanation.

The Beauty went out, and after about ten minutes the bells of Livy's ponies

were heard. He came in dressed—a fresh flower in his button-hole, a grey "gossamer" over his well-made coat.

"I am going to drive over your way, Hardman," he said; "and could drop you. No? All right, then; I can go by myself."

Again there was something of monkeyish malice in the look he gave her. Then he rattled away brilliantly on his course.

Young Hardman was at last gone, but the Beauty did not return for two or three hours. He arrived in a sort of complacent excitement, the symptoms of which his wife knew at once. As soon as he was in the drawing-room, he began—

"So it seems there is a marriage being arranged here, which it was not worth while communicating to me?"

"We had a reason for not telling you, Beauty dear."

"It sounds very respectable though for me to be told of such a thing outside. It is enough to make every one think I am a mere child and cipher in this house. Yes, a mere cipher and child! Who can respect me, if my own family show they do not?"

Mrs. Talbot listened with wonder to this new language, which she knew was not his own.

"There was nothing to tell you," she said. "It was only last night that he told his father."

"If I am to have any voice in the matter, I do not approve of it. There will be always a sense of patronage on one side, and an uneasy feeling of inferiority on the other."

Again these were new words for the Beauty—lent to him, as it were.

"Go away, dearest Livy. I want to talk to your father about this."

"Oh, nonsense. Why shouldn't she stay. We are not going to talk treason here; and if we are, she would not betray us. I don't like these private interviews."

"Go away, dear."

And Livy left the room. The Beauty did not relish these secret hearings. When they were alone his wife began, calmly—

"You must admit that our child has been the sweetest, most amiable, and devoted daughter that could be conceived. She has had rather a severe apprenticeship."

"Oh, yes; I am not saying anything against her."

"We must not be too selfish. She has

set her heart, her affections on this. That means, with one of her disposition—her all. You must see this?"

"Well, but I think it is not suitable for her. There will be that sense of inferiority——"

"Oh, I know—on one side. I would rather hear your own views and not Mrs. Labouchere's. You have them off by heart. Speak your own opinions, and I will pay them all respect."

The Beauty coloured, and grew confused.

She went on—

"You know how that woman treated me, how she dislikes me, how I despise her. Now I think, even for one's self-respect, it is scarcely decent of you to become her partisan, or to be affecting to be so intimate with her. It is not com-

plimentary to me; and I think it shows a little bad taste in you."

"Oh yes; but I have been treated too much as a child all along, and a cipher in the house; and I don't like it. If you knew what things are said——"

"By her?"

"By every one. It is perfect nonsense, and it can't go on. Why shouldn't I go and see her? Her kindness to me during all that time I shall never forget; and her sympathy and good-nature, too. Ah, *she* understands me. I am sure it is not unreasonable that a father should have a voice in the matter. I don't want to interfere with Livy and her happiness. He is a very good fellow, and all that; but I should have been told of it, consulted, and all that. It's only the proper thing, you see."

CHAPTER XI.

MR. HARDMAN PAYS A VISIT.

THE next day he went about dissatisfied, scarcely touching his piano. At dinner his wife said—

"Why don't you go out, dear, and take a good walk with Livy? You will get ill."

"O, I can't be always walking. Really, I'm not a school-boy quite—to be sent out to take an airing. If I had a horse, then I could ride—as every other man in a place like this has; but I can have nothing like any one else."

"But why not get a horse, dearest?

We should both be so glad to see you riding about."

"O, the expense! and you wouldn't like it. It wouldn't suit the petticoat government under which I live. O, no."

These, again, were words foreign to him; still they pointed merely at a little domestic grievance, not at the one which they so dreaded. It was a relief. Before the day was over, it had been all planned, and Mrs. Talbot came to him with a scheme.

"It is quite reasonable," she said; "and, indeed, I think you ought to have your horse. Livy and I make you a little present—this five-and-twenty pounds out of our bank; and you can make up the rest yourself."

The Beauty was greatly pleased, but

he was a gentleman, after all, and would not take their money.

"I am not so dependent as that," he said; "but I know where I can get a capital horse for forty pounds, and get time to pay for him, without taking your little money. No, no."

He was very proud of himself for this. Perhaps, too, he wished not to lay himself under any obligation which might hamper his future movements; perhaps he felt a twinge of conscience. No matter, the horse came home that very evening; and the Beauty took to making long rides.

Next day drove up the Hardman carriage, its owner seated back in it, with quite a sheriff-like air. He got out in a slow, solemn way; stood on the steps a few moments, giving orders to his ser-

vants while the door was kept open; then entered slowly.

"Tell Mrs. Talbot, please, that I would be obliged to her to let me speak to her privately. Privately!—you understand?"

It was wonderful the change in Mr. Hardman as he appeared to Mrs. Talbot when he entered. She understood it all, and it was a deep humiliation. There was a puffed importance, half medical, half official; and his chin was elevated some more degrees.

"I have come," he said, "to speak about this matter, which concerns us both so immediately."

"O, about the proposal your son made my daughter. It was so unexpected—such a surprise—that I thought it better not even to mention it when you were at Bindley."

She could not resist taking this tone, and it gave her her old superiority.

"Of course—of course," he said; "quite right. You see though, Mrs. Talbot, I have been turning the matter over a great deal; and, of course, it comes to this; I must look at it as a pure matter of business."

"A pure matter of business!" she repeated. "O, you are joking, surely?"

"Not all, ma'am. Love, and all that, is very well; but I, as a man of sense, must consider it in other ways. Now, I know you are people of good family and connections, and all that, and very suitable; but, then, our side has it corresponding advantages, too. My son will come into a very large income; I may naturally look for a very high and advantageous connection for him—very high,

ma'am, as things go now! Plenty of girls in the market—ay, and that I know of; people of rank, and all that."

"Then we have no wish to interfere with your *market*, Mr. Hardman; not for a moment."

"Now," went on Mr. Hardman, "I do not know what sort of fortune Miss Talbot will bring with her; but I may assume it will be a very moderate one. I am not saying there is any discredit in that—far from it; but——"

"Now once for all," said Mrs. Talbot, with a calm contempt, under which he became restless, "let us put this on its proper footing. This all should come last, instead of first. You seem to me to begin in the Turkish fashion; and I must tell you simply, Mr. Hardman, that *we* cannot treat, as you would call it, in this *rather*

business-like way. We must pay some little homage to the conventional usages, after such things are arranged; to a little regard and affection in the matter—the only things that would tempt us at all, or certainly my daughter, into the business. Let us speak frankly on the matter, Mr. Hardman. There are many reasons which should make this alliance unsuitable to both families; but the only one which makes us favour it, is that our children have set their hearts on it."

Very red and puffed, Mr. Hardman replies—

"Oh, I don't follow that at all, ma'am. With my fortune and my house, and the tone of the day, ma'am, I hold myself as a good connection for any lord's family in the kingdom; and as for my son's fancy, I don't value it *that*—not *that*, ma'am,

unless it should fall in with my plans."

Mrs. Talbot could have come forth with a contemptuous reply, that would have crushed him—taking him at his word, and leaving him there for ever. But the image of her child came back on her, worldly woman as she was.

"Napoleon said we were a nation of shopkeepers," she answered, with a smile; "and if he heard your views, Mr. Hardman, he might think himself right. But I may surely speak with the same frankness? Now this arrangement does fall in with *our*—with my plans—for we do value our daughter's fancy a great deal. You see that is quite an opposite view. However, there need be no hurry, surely, with such views on both sides? We may wait, I suppose, a little, while these young people

learn to test their affection? This was what I had to go through myself. Let us say four or five months; not a very long probation."

At this idea of confidential arrangement, the vulgarity of the man, swelling and swelling, frog-like, had like to fairly burst him.

"I see," he said; "well, we can wait, ma'am. You and I understand each other. All right!"

Vulgarity is, of course, used here after Sir Walter's definition or explanation of the word. His heart warmed at her tenacity of purpose.

"Hope to see you very often at the Towers, and that we shall see each other reciprocally. You mustn't mind," he added, loftily, "my daughter, Mrs. Labouchere. She has a putting-down way

with her; and at Bindley I know she was a little annoying. I told her so."

Mrs. Talbot writhed under this familiarity, more than she had ever done before. He went on—

"We like your husband very much; he is so pleasant and agreeable, and Mrs. Labouchere makes quite a pet of him. His voice is really getting very fine; and when he was lunching with us yesterday I thought that he sang better than I ever heard him."

The well trained lady showed no surprise. Mr. Talbot had not mentioned this visit. It flashed on her also—*this was the purpose for which the horse had been purchased.* It was growing serious indeed. There was something here like planning, and revolt.

It was a relief when Mr. Hardman went

away, going to call on Lady Shipley, and engage her for a dinner or lunch. Long after, Mrs. Talbot remained in a pensive, thoughtful attitude, lines growing in her forehead, searching out some plan. By dinner the Beauty was at home, in great spirits. He had enjoyed his ride thoroughly. He spoke of the visit of that morning.

"Mr. Hardman was here, was he not?" he said, with new respect, that was quite evident to all. "A real, intelligent, long-headed man. I can see he wishes to be friendly with us, and meet us more than half way; and it is really foolish to stand off now that he is to be connected with us. We have quite misjudged him all along; and I think his views on this matter do him great honour. These self-made men, you know, have a sensitiveness that seems to us pride."

These were wonderful distinctions for a man like the Beauty; but they were clearly not his own.

"He is very willing and very good-natured," went on the Beauty, warming. "He has asked me to dine to-morrow, in a friendly and family way. You know, as we are to be connected, it is absurd standing on ceremony."

"That is just the reason I would stand on ceremony with a person of his class. But you forget we have asked the parson and his family."

"Parson—nonsense!" the Beauty said pettishly. "So vexatious! Then you must put him off; I can't have my little amusements, without being interfered with in this way. Why can't I be like other men, who are consulted in these matters, before making my household

arrangements? I can't be here—indeed, I cannot. I don't want to be a child—a cipher—in my own house."

"He is a clergyman, and we must pay him respect. It can't be thought of. You must write and say you did not know of our invitation."

"Then I can't do anything of the kind. You must only entertain him yourself."

"No, no; you must not give way to such folly as that! You are not going to be *ungentlemanly*, I suppose?"

"Oh, that's a very smart way to put it! I am as gentlemanly as any other. But that's neither here nor there; and, I don't mean to be made a cipher of in my own house, and be laughed at. I can't do it, really."

"We shall see, dear," said Mrs. Talbot,

unhappily for her, beginning to lose her temper.

"Very well; we *shall* see," the Beauty answered, turning red. "This has gone on too long—much too long. I don't mean to make enemies, and lose my dinner party; and, if you were sensible, you would put no obstacle in the way, and fall in with my wishes."

These again were not his own words.

On this day the cheery figure of Mr. Lumley was seen stamping along up to the door, where he had not arrived for some time; he had had a bad fit of bronchitis, which he had fought off in his usual Widderington style—very much, as it was certain he would cross swords with the enemy he so dreaded. Here he was, "pulled down" a good deal, but cheery, as ever: in crimson tie, and pale trousers.

"Just come down to hear all the news," he said. "Been ill, you know, in my chambers; and have been cut off from that sort of nourishment—quite hungry and thirsty for it now."

So he was, for the world had behaved is its usual fashion to its dear worldlings when they are ill, or past work. And all his dear friends, when they heard that "old Dick was ill," assumed he was as good, or as bad, as dead. This was rather a shock to him; and it was natural he should first turn to the house where he had always received a friendly welcome, and where nothing had been expected in return. He must stay and spend the night, and he was delighted to do so.

His quick eye, in a few hours, saw how matters stood. With his old probe—a little bent and rusty now—he got to the

bottom of the Beauty's new weakness; and his sense was sufficiently alive to see how Mrs. Talbot was affected. Walking briskly round the garden, to get an appetite for breakfast, he met Livy, fresh and blooming as a rose, devouring, when she thought no one saw her, one of the welcome notes on blue paper, which came to her every morning from the Towers. Her story he soon learned; his pleasant "Robin-redbreast manner," as one of his friends called it, invited confidence, though it did not hold out sympathy; and he was amused to see the faint crack, "the little rift," which might make the music mute which Mr. and Mrs. Talbot played together so harmoniously. He began, almost at breakfast, with a comic story of a certain Bob Lindsay—one of the best things—married to one of the Fermors—

who got fifteen thousand, "which stopped some leaks in the ship."

"A shallow-pated fellow. The girl threw herself away; and the best was, I told her so, plainly."

The Beauty knows him, too, and says, contemptuously, "he had nothing in him."

Old Dick Lumley was now getting into one of his stories.

"Well, off they started; and who should they fall in with but that go-a-head Mrs. Allington, *née* Kitty Crowder, now separated from her husband, and with nothing to do. Well, no game would suit her but to worry a new married pair; and she did it. That wretched, empty-pated Bob Lindsay—you could not conceive the donkey she turned him into: making him fetch and carry; lend her money; pay her debts; in fact, do all those things we

might expect from Kitty. We, his friends, were sore to see him making such a goose of himself. I declare I was ashamed, and went and spoke to him; but was received as might be expected. All the time the woman was playing him off against a captain; and, when the opportunity came, he was left there, making a very pitiable show indeed. We had a good laugh at it, at I don't know how many dinner-parties."

The Beauty listened with a very put-out air, and moved restlessly on his chair.

"Oh, but he was always a fool. Nothing in him. That makes all the difference."

"Makes the difference from what?" said Old Dick, with a comic twinkle. "My dear fellow, *you* don't mean to justify married men going on in that style?"

"I didn't say so. Of course not. But

I mean a man isn't to be tied to apron-strings all his life. It makes him and his wife ridiculous."

"Not so ridiculous though," says Mrs. Talbot, "as that foolish philandering, as it is called—always childish in even young men, but, in men with a family, quite laughable."

The Beauty turned red and hot.

"Some one said, the other day, that those who were fondest of holding up everything as laughable were themselves the most laughable."

"A woman's speech, I'm sure, and a clever woman's!" said Mr. Lumley.

"Exactly," said the Beauty, eagerly; "a most clever woman, with quite a turn for epigram. Touches off everything like that."

"You are speaking of Mrs. Labouchere,

I suppose," said his wife, with a smile of contempt. "Your standard of epigram cannot be very high."

"Oh! what, the woman that married poor Labouchere, the tinplate or machinery man's daughter? Oh, I believe there were some nice doings out at Malta, or Gibraltar, or wherever they were. She was a sort of professional flirt. What *was* the story about some young fellow? Poor Lab had enough of his bargain, I believe."

Old Dick Lumley, it is to be feared, had neither chapter nor verse for these scraps of scandal; but his was not as other men's scandal. He imagined that, under certain conditions, there were things that *must* happen, or else the world would be turned upside down; and that a woman—of the sort he had settled Mrs.

Labouchere to be — must behave in a corresponding way. He had no scruple, therefore, in saying a thing of this sort.

Mrs. Talbot tossed her head calmly. "Only what we might expect."

"I am sure it is not what we might expect. She is a true, clever woman, full of taste and accomplishments——"

"What, because she gets you to sing, dear, all because she thinks I don't like your exhibiting yourself?"

"Why, Talbot, you're not her champion, are you? For shame, sir. You shock my morals. Depend upon it, the woman wants to get something out of you."

Miss Livy, it may be said, was not present.

"Oh, yes!" said the Beauty, trying to

sneer, "that is all very well! I assure you, there are some really good-natured and kind people in the world. As for these stories, I simply say, I don't believe a word of them. She is above that sort of thing. And I think it is a shame to have such tales circulated about people."

"Oh, my dear friend, you are not turning philosopher on us? There is chapter and verse to be had for all these sort of things; and if you take a man of the world's advice, you'd give her a wide berth. That's all I have to say about it. As for stories; why, you remember what I told you the last time I was here?"

The Beauty was quick enough to see an advantage here.

"If it was as true as *that* story, why, it was *your*" (to Mrs. Talbot) "spreading

that calumny that made Colonel Labouchere marry her. *I* heard what he said——"

"My spreading a calumny! You cannot know what you are talking about. You should not make such speeches, even before a friend like Mr. Lumley."

"Then ladies' characters should not be taken away before him either."

"Come, now," says Old Dick, "don't let us be magnifying things more than we need. What have we to do with this woman at all? Let her be. Let her be, and go on with her pranks. What do we care?"

"She is to be connected with my family," says the Beauty, "to be Livy's sister-in-law; so I think we owe something to our own respect."

Mr. Lumley was amazed and ever

silenced. It was wonderful how the Beauty had picked up all these topics from a certain quarter, and put them by for use. He saw, too, that he had the best of it, and quitted the room with a foolish pride and heat. He got out his horse. Mrs. Talbot fretted, beside herself with forebodings, and mad with herself for having lost the old buckler of patience and indifference which she had so long carried, now despised herself for her want of restraint, and for having given this weak soul such an advantage. The sound of the horse riding away almost struck a chill; and, though she saw from the window that he took another road, she knew he was artful enough to take a round, and then go in the direction of The Towers.

Old Dick Lumley, with his spectacles

on—never troublesome in a house—was left in the drawing-room, reading the *Court Journal*.

"What is over our friend?" he said, as she entered. "Foolish fellow! But let me give you a bit of advice, my dear—and I heard old Lady Mantower give it again to her daughter—laugh at everything of the kind: show that you don't care that for it. He'll soon tire of it. Talbot is a little youngish still, though he has a grown-up daughter—who, however, looks about six years younger than her mamma," added Old Dick, mending an awkward inference.

She was not thinking of such things.

"Oh, *he* is nothing! But she is a dangerous, *wicked* woman. What did you hear about her? Tell me—do."

"Oh, come," says Dick, taking off his

spectacles, "you nearly got me into a scrape before. Now, do take care about these things; it is very incautious, and with a low creature of that sort. Oh, I can't give chapter and verse for all the scraps I hear at this dinner and that, no more than I can for all the scraps I eat."

"But you said you could give chapter and verse. Do tell me; and you'll ever oblige me."

"Oh, my dear woman, nonsense; I really can't. And now, I must speak to you about all this. You are making mountains of mice, and will give yourself a great deal of annoyance, yet, depend upon it; take an old friend's word for it. Let our Beauty sing his little song, and pay his little visits to this Labouchere, and get what amusement he can out of it.

She, or he, will soon tire of it. She'll find it troublesome the first, and perhaps snub him. And then, you see, there's this marriage coming on, the connection between the families; one must keep up a decency. No, no; take my advice and leave it alone. At dinner, you'll see how I'll laugh him out of it."

This was sound advice from a man who knew a good deal. It had been well for that lady had she followed it, for she would have been spared many troubles. During the day the veteran and Livy went out for a short walk, when he enforced the same doctrine. "We must keep our mamma a little in hand, or she will be worried more than you could possibly dream of. She must not be too sensitive about these things. We all know papa, a good and capital fellow in his way; but

a very young and good-looking papa, and rather inclined to be led by the last person met—you understand."

"Oh, Mr. Lumley!" said Livy, opening her heart. "This is what I am thinking of, and it gives me such a deal of anxiety, I hardly know what to do."

"She must just show that she is utterly indifferent to his little amusements. Why shouldn't she? There's no harm in him. And I think I know that lady a little, who is to be your sister-in-law, and I can tell you she is a person not to fall out with. She has all the sensitiveness of inferior caste, feeling herself at the mercy of one in the position of your mother. It is like a rankling sore. Take my advice, and leave her alone."

CHAPTER XII.

FACE TO FACE.

THE old *gandin* was fond of Livy in his own way, and but for the horror he had of the arch enemy, and of all its associations, ceremonies, &c., which made him turn his back on the idea of "a will," he might have put her down for a little legacy. She came in very grave from that walk. Old Dick had had a little quiet nap of a quarter of an hour, with his handkerchief over his head, and was reading his *Court Journal* comfortably in the library, by himself, when he heard the sound of wheels crunching the gravel of the place. It was

the great Hardman *Berline*, ploughing its way up to the door. Mr. Lumley peered round the edge of the curtain to see who it was, and, seeing but indistinctly, wondered who the showy dressed lady was who got out. He wondered still more when the servant came and told him that Mrs. Labouchere wished to see him. Why she wished to see him, at once flashed upon "Old Dick," and he employed the minute's interval in marshalling his thoughts.

The lady swept in haughtily. Mr. Lumley bustled about, as obsequious as any young cavalier.

"Bless me!" he said, "some time since we last met, Mrs. Labouchere. I am not a man for compliments, or I would——"

"Nor do I care for them," she said, impatiently. "I have not come to this house

to receive them; that you may be certain of."

"To be sure!" said he, a little put out. "Did I understand, though, you wished to see me? Mrs. Talbot, I am sure——"

"She is coming—ah, here she is."

And Mrs. Talbot entered, with a nervous flush on her cheeks; but with her lips compressed, as if ready to go through anything.

"Now," said the visitor, in an icy measured tone. "I have come to pay this visit because I wished to see Mrs. Talbot and Mr. Lumley both together. I am so glad to have found you."

"This seems a sort of mystery. Pray explain, as quickly as you can."

"I have been informed that it was stated in this house, that certain stories could be told of my behaviour abroad, during the

life-time of my husband. I may as well mention that this escaped by a sort of accident from Mr. Talbot. It was Mr. Lumley who said he could bring forward some racy anecdotes of this sort. Mrs. Talbot seemed to say they would be of such a character as she could expect. Now, I ask Mr. Lumley distinctly, what are these slanders ?"

Mute astonishment was in the faces of both; dismay in that of Mr. Lumley. He almost trembled.

"O ! my dear lady !" he gasped. "Surely you don't attach importance to any idle——"

"What are these slanders—these stories. Do you know of any time or place ?"

"Oh, really, if one were to remember all the gossip—"

"Do you venture to say there is any ?

I, that was known in the place for my devotion to my husband—for my almost recluse sort of life! Do you dare, Mr. Lumley, to say so; or do you shrink from substantiating your words?"

"My dear Mrs. Labouchere, I neither substantiate, nor shrink from them: simply, because, there is nothing in the matter. You know, I hear—going about in my little way—such a quantity of stories, odds and ends, and all that, that one confuses names sometimes."

"Then you heard nothing of me—yes or no: recollect this is a question of calumny, not of accuracy?"

"Well—er—*no*, Mrs. Labouchere. I am sure I confounded one name with another."

"Are you certain—yes or no again?"

"Well, yes."

"There! I thought so. Then I simply say the whole is false—a fabrication. For shame! you should be more careful. An old man like you! Are you satisfied, Mrs. Talbot?"

"Am I satisfied?"

"You are doubtful? What, after Mr. Lumley withdrawing his statement? I suppose you do not doubt his words. I should not take this trouble, only that I am obliged to do it, from what happened before. You recollect?"

Mrs. Talbot, every time that she met this lady, was more and more conscious of a weakness in her presence—that she was in presence of a mistress. Her little sparkling waters of readiness seemed to her all dried up. She felt she could not answer, except with rudeness.

"I do not think of the matter one way

or the other. It is new, certainly, that we should be brought to account for what is said at our private breakfast table."

"You must make your husband accountable for that, not me."

"Ah, poor Talbot! make him accountable, poor boy, for a few light words. My dear Mrs. Labouchere, you won't take an action against us, or put me in the stocks for my little anecdotes?"

"You call them anecdotes; I call them——"

"Exaggeration? well. But, my dear madam, you must consider this; everybody of note must be talked about, and have things said about them. It's a sort of compliment. No lady in society minds it. It shows she's of importance. Come, don't be too hard on me."

She gave this "poor old creature,"

who was glancing nervously at her, a look of contempt, then turned to Mrs. Talbot.

"We shall say no more about it. Is Olivia, so I must call her, as she is to be my future sister-in-law, at home? I should like to see her."

"She has gone out."

"I am so sorry. Everything seems to combine to make our families intimate. Your daughter marries my brother. I discover Mr. Talbot's musical gifts, and he comes over to get lessons. Almost the first day of our acquaintance, my father brings you the present of a picture."

"Which I refused," adds Mrs. Talbot, quickly.

"Which you refused, and mortified him. In spite of that, we are all being drawn closer together. I, myself, shall not be here very long; the country makes me

dismal, and I sigh for the rarefied social air of London."

After this, she rose to go, Mrs. Talbot, still under the spell, and not able to make any battle. She felt herself overpowered. Old Dick, going out with extra gallantry to see the lady to the carriage, no hat on his head. Then Mrs. Talbot stood up hastily, with a wild and fierce look.

"I cannot endure this longer—coming into my own room to insult me! I could kill her!"

Soon after, the Beauty came riding home in great spirits. He did not reckon on what was in store for him. Mr. Lumley was the first to enlighten him, who fell on him with an old man's bitterness.

"I say, my friend, are you losing your wits? That was a very shabby trick of

yours; and, really, we'll have to talk before you, as cautiously as before the servants, if you go on this way. My dear, good Beauty, what was over you, that you should go and tell what we were talking of here, your wife and I?"

The Beauty coloured deeply.

"I don't know what you mean."

"Oh, but you do. She was here in her coach, and there was the devil to pay, and all that. Really you don't know what has happened. You know, if we lose confidence among gentlemen, why we may as well give up."

"And she came here and told you? What a thing!"

"Rather, what a thing of you, to denounce your own wife and your guest. I declare it looks like madness."

"I never did it. She got it out of me.

She said she was sure that you and Mrs. Talbot were cutting her up; and then I was so astonished——"

"What, now tell of *her!* Here Mrs. Talbot! Here is the informer."

She looked at him with a contempt which he shrank from.

"I do not believe it still," she said. "Can it be possible you should have done this? I prefer to think it an invention."

"Oh, it's not fair, all this; both of you setting on me. I tell you she is very clever and puts things together; and I know——"

"I wish to hear no more of it. We must be only more careful in future. There is dinner."

"I believe," said Old Dick Lumley to her, privately, "it is as he says. That

Labouchere enticed it all out of him. Don't let us bother him any more about it. Never fear, though," added Old Dick, looking as spiteful as a demon; "*I'll pay her!*" And when he was going to his own room he repeated the promise, with an addition,—"*By* ——, *I'll pay her!*"

This incident, however, was very disastrous for the Beauty, who felt he had committed a most compromising blunder, and placed himself at the mercy of the family. Mr. Lumley, introducing some of his good things, would say,—

"Now I must make it as a request, Talbot, that you will not repeat this to the parties concerned; it would bring about serious mischief."

On which Mrs. Talbot would add,—

"I prefer to lose the story altogether.

I have no wish to be drawn into the matter, and have them invading our house to call me to account."

"But, in this matter of to-day, what amuses me is to see the unkind return you met with—the betrayer betrayed in his turn. There is no faith in these matters. It is always the way. Certainly a most mortifying return for volunteering a communication. But, my dear fellow, whatever you do, let me off in future—or, at least, tell me, and I'll keep a regular padlock on my jaws in your presence."

The Beauty was much mortified by this lecture. He felt himself in the power of these two people, and knew his own weakness. Yet the iron, shaped like a pin, had entered into his soul; and he longed to revenge himself.

Old Dick Lumley, as he took his candle that night, talked with the hostess in a comfortable, self-satisfied way.

"You have done him a world of good. You see, I have met such a deal of character, I know exactly what suits each. A stiff, tight hand is the only thing with our poor fellow—just a little severity. You see how I brought him up. Oh, it has done him a world of good."

Mrs. Talbot thought so too; and when they were alone, and the Beauty was looking moodily into the fire, said, firmly,—

"What made you do that to-day? Are you taking leave of your senses, or of the common notions of a gentleman?"

He did not answer.

"Such a disgraceful, disreputable business—like what a child in a nursery would

do. You must really reform all these boyish ways. It is not respectful to me, and you only expose yourself to such mortification as you received to-day. If you do not choose to keep up my respect, I shall not take any trouble about yours. I don't choose to hear your second-hand opinions, and you need not bring any more of them here. A pretty brains-carrier you have chosen !"

The Beauty lifted his face, flushed with anger.

" Ah, you are afraid of her ! No wonder. She lectured you well to-day. Came off to attack you in your own den ! Oh, yes ! You'll not find she'll be put down in that way. As she says, she is going to be Olivia's sister-in-law, and the families to be connected ; and yet we try and shut our eyes, and affect to despise her. She

says it's very poor pride, and that if we had real sense we would make as much of their family as possible; and that people will only laugh at the contradiction. Oh, yes!"—the only sort of sneer the Beauty could manage—"And, I tell you, I shouldn't be surprised, if she yet *forced you* to receive her with the greatest cordiality."

Mrs. Talbot listened with wonder and even terror. There was truth in this.

"O! We shall see that! Let her try it. Let you both try it."

The foolish husband smiled with delight. He had touched her.

"Oh, I think it only sensible; when I go so far as to connect myself with a family who may not be in our station, I would make the best of it; and, I tell you, *I* mean to be on as friendly terms

as possible with them. You can do as you please, of course."

"It matters very little what you do," said the hurt Mrs. Talbot, forgetting all her old tactics, her labour of years, in a moment. "Mrs. Labouchere is not a person that I should enter into any contest of the kind with; and as for you, you are not very dangerous. What would you be without me, I should like to know? Who would care anything what you say or do—you poor, foolish creature! What would you be thought of at all, but for me? It is like your foolish ingratitude to forget all that you owe to me, who got you the very place that helps to buy you ivory brushes, and pomatums, and scents. Who is it that prevents you being considered a mere cipher among men, and keeps you from being laughed at? Oh, it

is time to speak plainly, and let you know all this."

"It's all untrue, and you shouldn't speak to me in that way. Yes; if you knew what is said, and how they laugh at me for allowing it. Oh, yes! I've kind friends, who tell me for my good; and I'm really obliged to them, who have my interest at heart, too. Yes, that's exactly what I hear. They do laugh at me, because I seem to be worried and ordered about; so it comes very badly from *you*. But it musn't go on; and you'll see it won't."

Mrs. Talbot's heart struck her as she heard these words, and her lips trembled, as she could only murmur,—

"What do you mean? You are talking folly."

That night she almost execrated the

foolish advice of Old Dick Lumley; for the Beauty, with all his folly, had gained a substantial victory.

END OF VOL. II.